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**Literary Geographies of the Boom:
Perceptions of Space in Post-War Italian
Literature (1956–1979)**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Italian

University of Warwick, School of Modern Languages and Cultures

September 2018

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Jennifer Burns, for providing expert and perceptive guidance, and for always being at hand, with a positive and supportive attitude, whenever issues and doubts have arisen during the past four years. Many thanks are also due to Dr Fabio Camilletti for supervising the project and offering insightful comments. I am grateful to the University of Warwick for funding this research project and to the School of Modern Languages and Cultures for offering professional and financial support, which allowed me to participate in academic conferences that have been rich and stimulating in intellectual exchange and encounters.

A special thank you goes to the staff at Cafe Rustique, Tufnell Park, where I have found a welcoming environment and some of the best cakes in North London, to inspire me through the writing of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to all those people (they know who they are) who in these years have reminded me of the value of community, by sharing my concerns and enthusiasms, and by spending a kind word of support in the challenging moments of my PhD journey.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

This research offers an account of the post-war transition in Italy through different literary voices, belonging to various genres, and their original and complementary narration of post-war Italy's changing geography. Two chapters of the dissertation concentrate on Milan and Turin, the expanding industrial cities of the North, in the novels of Bianciardi (*La vita agra*, 1962), Volponi (*Memoriale*, 1962; *Le mosche del capitale*, 1989), Scerbanenco (*Venere privata*, 1966; *Traditori di tutti*, 1966; *I ragazzi del massacro*, 1968; *I milanesi ammazzano al sabato*, 1969) and Fruttero & Lucentini (*La donna della domenica*, 1972; *A che punto è la notte*, 1979). The focus of the last chapter broadens to embrace the socio-cultural landscape of the country, through the analysis of post-war Italian travel writing and the specific examples of Piovene (*Viaggio in Italia*, 1957), Ortese (*La lente scura*, 1991) and Arbasino (*Fratelli d'Italia*, 1963).

The exploration of literary geographies, corroborated by theories of space in contemporary societies, is functional to challenge narrations of the boom as chiefly a time of growing prosperity and optimism, and instead exposes ambiguous feelings about Italian modernity. The post-war years are seen as a period in which feelings of hope and anxiety coexist and inter-mingle, and where existential uncertainty provides a driving force for the examined authors to challenge accepted ways of seeing and being, in the framework of the postmodern theories that are slowly infiltrating the Italian cultural debate in those years. Coherently with the interpretation of the boom as a 'space of cultural transition' (Minghelli, 2016), the texts are somewhat suspended between past, of which they retain some central thematics (alienation, anxiety) and future, as some of the arguments that shape the postmodern sensitivity can be traced between the lines, in the tension toward a different understanding of modernity. The innovative selection of authors and genres sheds new light on the inconsistencies of post-war development, as well as reframing key issues in post-war Italian society, such as the inability to incorporate a critical reflection upon the past into the process of nation and identity building in this crucial moment of the country's history.

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the Italian post-war years brought about dramatic change in lifestyles and in social and economic structures, a continuing symptom being the fact that, in the collective imagination, that period of extraordinary growth is still regarded as the ‘miracle’.¹ This research addresses that crucial historical shift through the literary perspective and, more specifically, through the analysis of the representations of urban and national space in the works of several Italian authors, spanning a range of literary genres, which were published between 1957 and 1979. The first chapter of the dissertation outlines the conceptual framework of the research, illustrating the main theories and studies that support the textual analysis which follows. Chapters 2 and 3 look at Milan and Turin, the booming industrial cities of the North, in the novels of Luciano Bianciardi and Paolo Volponi, and the crime fiction of Giorgio Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini respectively. The focus of Chapter 4 broadens to consider the national territory and national spatial issues, through a discussion of some relevant examples of travel literature of the time by Italian writers Guido Piovene, Anna Maria Ortese and Alberto Arbasino.

Literature is a powerful tool for studying social change, thanks to its ability to disclose multiple layers of interpretation and meaning, and to transport the individual reader into the lived experience of subjects whose point of view s/he may otherwise not be aware of. The texts under scrutiny in this research are no exception. Indeed, on the one hand, they provide new insights into post-war Italy’s urban renewal (Chapters 2 and 3) and, on the other, they transcend clichéd representations of the Italian territory and national identity (Chapter 4). Writers are ‘active agents’² in their social and cultural system, and the tension that literary works generate reverberates through the diversified and somewhat unpredictable positioning of readers, sparking debate and encouraging discussion – all the more so in the era of mass communication. Literary representations

¹ It is significant, for example, that two of the key texts at which we will look more closely in the course of this dissertation, use the term ‘miracle’ in their title. I am referring to Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano: culture, identità, trasformazioni fra anni cinquanta e sessanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2003); and John Foot, *Milan Since the Miracle: City, Culture, and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

² Ann Hallamore Caesar and Michael Caesar, *Modern Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 8.

of space are especially fruitful for investigating the complexities of post-war Italian society, for they illuminate the interconnections of socio-political, economic and cultural changes, as well as the direct relation to the interiority of individuals. The question of the subject's interaction with the environment is at the core of humanist geography and its definitions of place and space.³ As Silvia Ross remarks, 'the human experiential element of a given geography is [...] as important as the inanimate surroundings'.⁴ This dissertation displays the interplay between these two poles and assigns centrality to the writers' perceptions of space, by focusing on their interiorisation of spatial changes.

In this research, the analysis draws on non-conventional and popular forms of writing, such as crime fiction and travel literature, which have traditionally been seen as less important within the Italian literary tradition (but enjoyed a revival starting from the 1960s) and that, therefore, with their oppositional energies, can open up the space for radically new ways of addressing questions of space and identity. By examining quite diverse authorial perspectives and forms of writing, the ambiguity and intensity of feeling that characterise the period under scrutiny emerge more starkly, along with some of the underlying patterns of post-war Italian society. When we talk about the boom, the mind instinctively goes to images of those years that have sedimented in the collective memory through advertisements, photographs, and video clips portraying smiling families and young people on their brand new Lambretta or Fiat Cinquecento, which have become the iconographical symbols of the alleged carefree prosperity and the new freedom of movement that characterise post-war Italy. In the public imagination, the boom is also associated with the golden era of TV and Italian cinema.⁵ It is not rare for Italians today to compare the issues of present-day Italian society with the post-war period, in which things were going well. Nevertheless, in more recent years historians and scholars of

³ Silvia Ross observes that 'what does emerge in the diverse theoretical understandings of place and space is an increasing acknowledgement that these concepts must perforce be analysed in relation to subjectivity [...]. Thus, when interpreting space, it becomes necessary to ask questions such as: Who perceives? How do the actions of the subject produce space? How does the subject experience space?'. Silvia Ross, *Tuscan Spaces: Literary Constructions of Place* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2010), p. 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵ Such views can be found, for example, in the documentaries of the Archivio Luce, whose rhetoric describes a glittering, prosperous, and carefree period. This idea persists to the present day and is reinforced through the contrast with current socio-economic issues in Italy. An example of the enduring fascination with the boom as a golden era, in contrast to other phases of contemporary Italian history, may be a recent novel by Giuseppe Lupo, which gives a largely positive portrait of post-war Italian society: Giuseppe Lupo, *Gli anni del nostro incanto* (Venice: Marsilio, 2017).

contemporary Italy, have increasingly pointed out the contradictions that mark the process of economic development after the end of World War II.

A central point of this research is to present Italy's economic boom period as an ambiguous transition, where elements of continuity with the past overlap with new energies and aspirations. Against this general backdrop, Chapters 2 and 3 are, so to speak, more entangled with the past, their main focus being, respectively, the persistence, in the post-war period, of totalitarian and repressive practices implemented under the pre-war governments, and the inability of post-war Italian society to promote a critical examination of the past, in order to foster the process of nation and identity building. The last chapter, focusing on post-war Italian travel writing, hints at more recent developments, both in terms of questions of spatiality and representation, and epistemic and stylistic features of the examined texts, which shift, particularly with Ortese and Arbasino, toward literary experimentalism and the debunking of the stable and self-assured position of the writer-narrator. In this sense, the modernity–postmodernity framework that will be outlined below unfolds coherently with the organisation of the chapters in the dissertation, since the evolution toward postmodernity gradually takes shape, as the focus moves outwards from urban to national spatial issues. It may also be said that the succession of the chapters mirrors the increasing openness, in the Italian cultural and literary scenes, for postmodern ideas and impulses. This can be argued not only about the 'decentred' perspective offered by Chapter 4, but also in relation to the selection of the primary materials and conceptual notions that, throughout the dissertation, are implicated with this historical and intellectual transition.

The selection of literary texts and the emphasis on their representation of post-war Italy's changing geography are functional to challenge narrations of the time frame under scrutiny as chiefly a period of achieved prosperity and growing optimism, and expose, instead, a darker side of the boom, by highlighting the feelings of disorientation and unease that run through the texts, due to the very controversial nature of the Italian modernisation process. This underlying anxiety may be related, on the one hand, to disorientation due to rapid social change and, on the other, to the failure of Italian society to incorporate a critical reflection on the past with social and economic changes. This, of course, is not to deny that the post-war years also coincide with increasing wealth for the

expanding middle class, with cultural and literary ferment, and the introduction of innovative ideas in all aspects of Italian life. Indeed, as Crainz has remarked,

Le potenzialità che si dispiegano in quel torno di tempo non suscitano solo frenesie acquisitive: alimentano anche fermenti, aspirazioni, ansie e progetti riformatori, in un pullulare di energie intellettuali di straordinaria vivacità.⁶

What Crainz describes as ‘ansia di progetto’,⁷ goes hand in hand with the attempt, among Italian intellectuals, to get to grips with the transformations under way. The historical anxiety can therefore be seen also as a liberating force that leads the examined authors to put into question and re-think accepted modes of representation and ways of seeing, especially in relation to space and identity. Once again, literature has something specific and valuable to contribute in this context, in that it permits or encourages imaginative and alternative ways of seeing how society is or could be.

As will be discussed in greater detail in the literature review section in Chapter 1, the analysis of how literary texts document and question Italian post-war socio-spatial transformations is interwoven throughout the dissertation with theories of space in contemporary societies, employing some of the formulations and arguments that have propelled the so-called ‘spatial turn’ in postmodern theory. The predominance of spatial categories over those of time, has been one of the notable features of the transition from the modern to the postmodern paradigm, as widely acknowledged by theorists and scholars, such as, notably, Fredric Jameson, Edward Soja, David Harvey and Umberto Eco. Postmodern theories have offered a framework to try and make sense of the increasingly globalised and interconnected world that has developed after the end of the Second World War, with the unprecedented diffusion of information and communication technologies. Among the intellectuals and philosophers whose work has led to the ‘rediscovery’ of space, one can certainly include Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre. Michael Dear, for instance, points out that Lefebvre has played a pivotal role in

⁶ Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, p. xiii.

⁷ *Ibid.*

orientating social theory toward space and away from analyses of time.⁸ Foucault and Lefebvre, and specifically the part of their work that explores the connection between spatial organisation and the exercise of power, provide the point of reference for the analysis carried out in Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation.

The texts under scrutiny, most notably those analysed in Chapter 3, confirm the gap in our understanding and representation of space, rejecting rationalist approaches and echoing, instead, the renewed interest in the unconscious and irrational in critical theory (as shown, for instance, by the reappraisals of the Freudian theory of the uncanny discussed in the same chapter), as well as postmodern analyses of the fluidity and hybridity of space, such as those developed by Jameson and De Certeau, among others. Jameson, in particular, has argued that the built environment of neo-capitalist societies is being transformed at such speed that we as space users have not been able to adapt and improve our ability to navigate it.⁹ The texts examined in Chapter 2 reverberate these ideas through their criticism of the post-war process of urban redefinition, which has promoted industrial values of efficiency and rationality over accessibility and inclusivity. As cities where powerful industrial and political interests have come to converge, the Milan and Turin of the post-war years provide a particularly fitting context to test these views. From the privileged observatory of these metropolitan settings, where modern and traditional tendencies clash more vividly, the authors analysed in Chapters 2 and 3 prove acute commentators of the rise of urban modernity in Italy, and further revitalise an enduring literary tradition, inspired by Milan and Turin.

Provincial and tangential perspectives find room in the travel accounts examined in Chapter 4, though, in line with the previous two chapters, the latter also looks at Milan and Turin, especially through the work of Piovene. Chapter 4 hints at mobility as one of the defining aspects of the post-war years: not only the modern exaltation of movement, but also the mass internal migration of Italians from the impoverished areas of the country, as well as a different kind of intellectual mobility,¹⁰ in which the professional and existential trajectories of Bianciardi, Volponi and Scerbanenco, among other writers, are especially relevant. The rise of a type of mobility which is not constrained by social

⁸ Michael J. Dear, *The Postmodern Urban Condition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 47.

⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 38.

¹⁰ Crainz, for example, puts stress on 'le aspirazioni di strati intermedi che partecipano in modo intenso ai fenomeni di mobilità' (*Storia del miracolo italiano*, p. 109).

status or modelled on some pre-packaged idea of Italian journey, but is rather motivated by critical investigation and reflexive self-exploration, results in new ways of narrating the Italian national space and identities within it. The wider focus on national spatial issues adopted in Chapter 4, sheds light, on the one hand, on questions of national identity and nation building and, on the other, on the evolution of Italian literature in the mid-1950s and 1960s.

In terms of periodisation of the thesis and of defining dates within the surveyed time frame, the first consideration concerns the patterns of continuities that exist between the Italian literary production of the 1930s and 1940s.¹¹ It has been argued that Neo-realism, commonly seen as a break-up movement and the literary expression of the Italian Resistance, actually re-semanticises some of the traits of Fascist culture and, specifically, the realism of the 1930s.¹² For this reason, critical opinion has generally regarded 1956 as the beginning of a new phase in Italian literature.¹³ While dates and periodisations always retain a degree of arbitrariness, and there is obviously no such thing as homogeneous literary trends or historical periods, in the context of this research surveying a sample of Italian literary works written in the post-war period, 1956 provides a useful starting point for our investigation. It is, indeed, in 1956 that Piovene concludes his documentary journey of the Italian peninsula, before publishing *Viaggio in Italia* the following year. Moreover, as we will also see in the following chapters, the Soviet uprising of 1956 has deep repercussions in the Italian political and cultural climate, prompting a new intellectual openness which pre-dates by just two years the economic boom of 1958.

The end of the 1970s, where this study concludes, marks a further turning point in the Italian literary production and intellectual debate. Indeed, in the following decade, the presence of postmodern ideas becomes widespread and infiltrates all aspects of Italian cultural life, starting with the first Biennale of International Architecture, organised in 1980 by Italian architect Paolo Portoghesi and largely inspired by the Post-Modern movement of Charles Jencks.¹⁴ In 1979, Lyotard writes *La condition postmoderne*, while,

¹¹ Caesar and Caesar, p. 188.

¹² Anna Maria Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. xii-xiii.

¹³ Caesar and Caesar, p. 188.

¹⁴ Monica Jansen, *Il dibattito sul postmoderno in Italia: in bilico tra dialettica e ambiguità* (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2002), p. 29.

in Italy, Italo Calvino publishes his *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, which is widely regarded as one of the first and foremost examples, in the Italian contemporary tradition, of metaliterary fiction.¹⁵ As confirmation of the new trend, Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa* comes out the following year, in 1980. The transformation process, however, had started long before, with the development of mass media communication and technology at the end of the 1950s, and with the inclusion of ever greater numbers of people in the consumption of culture.¹⁶ Hence, the texts under scrutiny in this research embrace the whole period of slow assimilation of postmodern ideas in Italy and must have absorbed, if only osmotically and without a full-blown critical awareness (at least initially), impulses and reflections that have been organised more systematically during the decade of the 1980s and that find more mature expression in later texts examined in this dissertation, chiefly Volponi's *Le mosche del capitale* and Arbasino's *Fratelli d'Italia*.

Le mosche del capitale, which was published in 1989, may appear to be an exception to the time frame of the thesis. The publication of the novel, however, was only post-dated, and Volponi, who starts to write the book in 1975, refers to the same time period under scrutiny in this research, setting the story in 1970s Turin. Interestingly enough, moreover, 1989 is another crucial date in the consolidation of postmodern culture – marking the fall of the Berlin Wall and the radical evolution in the international geopolitical situation – and, more specifically, in the development of the postmodern debate in Italy. It is, indeed, in 1989 that Remo Ceserani publishes his translation of the highly influential essay by Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

It is worth specifying that, when I talk about the presence, in the examined texts, of some features of postmodern culture, I am aware that postmodernism is a highly diversified and somewhat controversial notion, which, over the past decades, has been subjected to uses and reuses that have resulted in a certain inflation of the term. On top of this, the reception of postmodernism in Italy, which is briefly retraced in the next chapter, has been particularly complex and stratified: unsurprisingly, in a context still largely dominated by a high and elitist idea of culture, postmodern ideas have encountered significant resistance. That being said, in this research, I am interested in highlighting the

¹⁵ Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative, 1980-2000* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2001), pp. 8-9.

¹⁶ Quoting Ceserani, Jansen argues that the end of the 1980s represents 'l'ultima fase di attuazione della svolta epocale, rimasta inavvertita, ma iniziata già intorno alla fine degli anni Cinquanta' (pp. 20-21).

unfolding, among the writers under examination, of a tension toward a different understanding of modernity, which I broadly associate with the framework of postmodern theories that are slowly infiltrating the Italian cultural debate in those years and with more evidence at the cusp of the 1980s, that is, at the point in which this research ends.

This research is therefore deeply implicated with the historical and cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity in Italy. The texts under scrutiny are located at the intersection of two traditions, and while they retain some of the central thematics of modernity, such as anxiety and alienation, they also anticipate the contours of postmodern thinking. The examined texts are innovative in a number of ways: for instance, in the modernisation of narrative styles and structures that, in the 1950s, had been overwhelmingly defined by realism as the dominant aesthetic, and in the emergence of perspectives that increasingly put into question all-encompassing narratives and the illusion of mastery of the writer-observer. This double nature, marked by the coexistence of elements of tradition and innovation, is, according to most critics, specific to post-war Italian culture,¹⁷ and links us back to the interpretation that has been presented above, of the Italian boom years as a testing ground where conservative tendencies coexist with new trends. The crucial implications for the later developments of Italian society are not directly addressed in this research. I am referring in particular to the so-called *anni di piombo*, which started with the 1969 Piazza Fontana bombing and continued through a string of attacks and terrorist actions during the following decade, and the 1968-69 years of *contestazione*.¹⁸

Finally, I shall spend a few words on the choice of the primary texts. It becomes evident in the course of the dissertation that the selected corpus of literary texts offers a varied and effective response to my research questions, outlined in Chapter 1. Moreover, it interacts productively with the theoretical framework of the thesis and engages directly with the research questions and topics addressed in each chapter, as well as with one another, therefore building a coherent and consistent argument throughout the thesis.

The authors analysed in this research concern themselves with the socio-economic transformations of post-war Italy and are non-canonical writers of the period under

¹⁷ See for instance Caesar and Caesar, p. 191.

¹⁸ Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato: dal miracolo economico agli anni Ottanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2003), p. 30.

scrutiny, who offer an insightful experience of how change in those years was perceived. The perspective that guides the analysis of their texts is also original. Indeed, broadly speaking, existing literary criticism on the examined authors has privileged the analysis of structural forms and stylistic features, for instance by concentrating on the literary genres with which the authors have experimented or by carrying out linguistic analyses of a specific work or epistolary.¹⁹ Very few studies have addressed fictional spaces, urban descriptions or the writers' relationship with nature and the landscape.²⁰ A particularly relevant example, in this regard, is the research that Marco Paoli has conducted on the representation of urban space in Scerbanenco's crime novels: a study to which this dissertation is certainly indebted to some extent.²¹ Nevertheless, this research develops a different type of discourse, which intersects with psychoanalytic ideas of the city and the notion of the uncanny to bring the hidden side of the boom years to the fore. More generally, no previous study appears to have approached the topic of this research from the same perspective or to draw on a similar, eclectic framework of theories.

Some studies have focused on major themes that constitute a thread in the literary production of a specific writer. Examples may be Bianciardi's life-long activity as a translator²² and his fascination with the Italian Risorgimento,²³ while one of the recurring topics in the literary criticism on Volponi is utopia, intended as the idea that underlies many of his books, that industry can be more humane when it draws on a technical

¹⁹ Examples of this general tendency in Italian literary criticism, may be found in relation to all of the examined writers. Particularly illustrative of the tendency to analyse different literary genres separately, is Salvatore Ritrovato and Donatella Marchi (eds), *Pianeta Volponi: saggi interventi testimonianze* (Pesaro: Metauro, 2007). The book chapters have been grouped into three thematic sections, respectively dedicated to poetry, the novel, and theatre. The former two are the genres that Volponi has employed the most during his career, while the section on theatre offers a 'theatrical reading' of Volponi's *Il pianeta irritabile* (1978), based on the fact that theatre has been an integral part of Volponi's education and training as a writer. Another example is offered by the studies on Arbasino's *Fratelli d'Italia*, which have concentrated on the language and, more specifically, the type of plurilingualism used by the writer in the novel, such as Clelia Martignoni, Cinzia Lucchelli and Elisabetta Cammarata (eds), *La scrittura infinita di Alberto Arbasino: studi su Fratelli d'Italia* (Novara: Interlinea, 1999), and Chantal Randoing, 'Il plurilinguismo del romanzo-conversazione in *Fratelli d'Italia* di Alberto Arbasino', *Collection de l'ÉCRIT*, 11 (2007), 359-375.

²⁰ See for instance Maria-Luise Caputo-Mayr, 'La funzione della natura e del paesaggio nei romanzi di Guido Piovene', *Italica*, 50.1 (1973), 53-65.

²¹ Marco Paoli, *Giorgio Scerbanenco: Urban Space, Violence and Gender Identity in Post-War Italian Crime Fiction* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2016).

²² Examples may be Luciana Bianciardi (ed.), *Carte su carte di ribaltatura: Luciano Bianciardi traduttore* (Florence: Giunti, 2000), and Antonella De Nicola, *La fatica di un uomo solo: sondaggi nell'opera di Luciano Bianciardi traduttore* (Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2007).

²³ In this regard, Magni has observed that Bianciardi re-reads this historical moment through the lens of the revolutionary aspirations of the 1960s, therefore conveying a somewhat utopian and romanticised version of the Risorgimento. Stefano Magni, 'L'ossessione dell'anarchico Bianciardi per il Risorgimento', *Italies*, 15 (2011), 225-241. On the significance of the Risorgimento in Bianciardi's oeuvre, see also Arnaldo Bruni, *Io mi oppongo: Luciano Bianciardi garibaldino e ribelle* (Ariccia: Aracne, 2016).

knowledge that is also infused with humanistic culture.²⁴ Moreover, the work of Bianciardi and Volponi has frequently been read by critics in terms of the analysis that the writers carry out of industrialisation and rising consumerism in post-war Italy, within the context of the burgeoning of the industrial novel in Italian literature of the time, to which I shall return in Chapter 2. With regard to Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini, existing scholarship has overwhelmingly focused on the literary format of the detective story, employed by these writers in its *noir* and *giallo* variations, and Scerbanenco's appropriation of the genre of the American hard-boiled.²⁵ Articles dedicated to Ortese reflect the eclectic nature of her writings and style, which lend themselves to an array of different interpretations and perspectives of analysis. The fact that Ortese has received increasing critical attention in recent years also bears witness to the renewed interest in women writing and gender-specific perspectives in literature, which is reflected in the publication of a number of studies on and anthologies of Italian women writers.²⁶ Also in the case of literary criticism on Ortese, however, there prevails the analysis of the literary genres (fiction, poetry, travel writing) and styles (for instance, the interaction between realism and fantastic elements), which define her oeuvre, together with philological analyses of a specific novel or short story, and the study of letters that Ortese exchanged with contemporary writers and intellectuals figures.²⁷

One of the main threads that can be detected in existing studies dedicated to the writers examined in this dissertation, is the acknowledgment that, allegedly, they have

²⁴ A few examples may be Ferdinando Viridia, 'Il tema è sempre l'utopia', *La fiera letteraria*, 12 (1974), 18-19; Daniele Fioretti, *Utopia and Dystopia in Postwar Italian Literature: Pasolini, Calvino, Sanguineti, Volponi* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); and Massimo Raffaelli (ed.), *Paolo Volponi: il coraggio dell'utopia* (Ancona: Transeuropa, 1997).

²⁵ See for instance Barbara Pezzotti, 'Italians Do It Differently: Giorgio Scerbanenco's Appropriation of the American Hard-Boiled Novel', *California Italian Studies*, 5.2 (2014), 106-124, and Marco Paoli, 'Spunti per un'analisi del processo di ibridismo tra l'hard-boiled americano e il giallo italiano nella serie Duca Lamberti di Giorgio Scerbanenco', *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 37.1 (2016), 17-34.

²⁶ See for instance Sandra Petrigiani, *Le signore della scrittura* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 1984), and Paola Azzolini, 'La donna iguana', in her *Il cielo vuoto dell'eroina: scrittura e identità femminile nel Novecento italiano* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2001), pp. 209-236.

²⁷ Examples of studies that have focused on Ortese's letters, are Martina Volpe, "'Colori, colori, ma la vita?': narrazioni autobiografiche nella scrittura epistolare di Anna Maria Ortese', *Esperienze letterarie*, 41.4 (2016), 131-142; María J. Calvo Montoro, "'Il vento è sempre contrario': le lettere di Anna Maria Ortese a Elsa de' Giorgi", *Forum Italicum*, 47.3 (2013), 604-618; Aurelio Benevento, 'Le lettere di Anna Maria Ortese a Dario Bellezza', *Riscontri*, 34.3-4 (2012), 106-110. Examples of articles that explore Ortese's distinctive style, are Amelia Moser, 'The Poetry of Prose: Anna Maria Ortese's Early Writings', *Italian Poetry Review*, 2 (2007), 443-468; Luigi Fonatella, 'Sulla poesia giovanile di Anna Maria Ortese', *Narrativa*, 24 (2003), 123-138; Beatrice Manetti, 'Il dettato dell'ombra: la scrittura autobiografica di Anna Maria Ortese', *Paragone*, 93-95 (2011), 104-123; Pasquale Sabbatino, 'La scrittura teatrale di Anna Maria Ortese', *Rivista di letteratura teatrale*, 1 (2008), 141-150.

not received adequate attention from critics and that they are generally more talked about than read.²⁸ With the exception of Arbasino, a major name in post-war Italian culture and, one could argue, of Fruttero & Lucentini, who were also leading Italian intellectual figures, the remaining writers are for different reasons considered to be marginal and discordant voices within the Italian literary tradition. This is particularly true in the cases of Bianciardi, Volponi, and Ortese, who have been labelled irregular and rebellious, also due to the difficulty of classifying their writings within the main literary trends of their time. In the case of Bianciardi, this issue is often raised together with the question of his bad-tempered and solitary personality, his prose allegedly possessing a similar, nervous quality.²⁹ Pino Corrias uses the definition of ‘anarchico’,³⁰ while other critics have described Bianciardi as ‘eretico’ and ‘scrittore fuori dal coro’.³¹ A recent book by Gian Paolo Serino, titled *Il precario esistenziale*, confirms that to this day this image of Bianciardi continues to exert fascination over his readers and the wider intellectual community. Volponi, whose complete works have recently been collected by Einaudi in the volumes edited by Emanuele Zinato,³² has also been described as ‘fuori dal coro, anti-canónico’³³ and ‘diverso’.³⁴ In regard to Ortese, Della Coletta has observed that ‘la critica degli ultimi quarant’anni ha tracciato il profilo letterario della scrittrice sulle coordinate dell’estraneità, della marginalità e della non catalogabilità’.³⁵ Nevertheless, as stated above, it should be noted that Ortese has attracted a great deal of interest, especially in recent years, with a large number of articles that examine various aspects of her life and career. Some scholars believe that Piovene has also been generally neglected in literary

²⁸ Talking about Bianciardi, Serino claims that ‘il vero dramma di Luciano Bianciardi è di essere più commentato che letto. Ancora oggi molti conoscono *La vita agra*, ma ben pochi l’hanno letto davvero’. Gian Paolo Serino, *Luciano Bianciardi: il precario esistenziale* (Florence: Clichy, 2015), p. 20.

²⁹ Paolo Zublena, ‘Dentro e fuori la scrittura anarchica: la lingua della *Vita agra* di Bianciardi’, *Il Verri*, 37 (2008), 46-62.

³⁰ Pino Corrias, *Vita agra di un anarchico: Luciano Bianciardi a Milano* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1996).

³¹ Giuseppe Muraca, *Utopisti ed eretici nella letteratura italiana contemporanea: saggi su Silone, Bilenchi, Fortini, Pasolini, Bianciardi, Roversi e Bellocchio* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2000); *Ibid.*, *Luciano Bianciardi: uno scrittore fuori dal coro* (Pistoia: Centro di Documentazione, 2012).

³² Emanuele Zinato (ed.), *Paolo Volponi: romanzi e prose*, 3 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 2002-2003). See also Gian Carlo Ferretti and Emanuele Zinato (eds), *Volponi personaggio di romanzo: con tre testi inediti* (San Cesario di Lecce: Manni, 2009).

³³ Ritrovato and Marchi, p. 7.

³⁴ Alfonso Berardinelli, ‘Volponi, uno scrittore “diverso”’, in *Paolo Volponi: il coraggio dell’utopia*, ed. by M. Raffaelli, pp. 11-18.

³⁵ Cristina Della Coletta, ‘Scrittura come utopia: *La lente scura* di Anna Maria Ortese’, *Italica*, 26.3 (1999), 371-388 (p. 371).

criticism. Parisi, for instance, stresses ‘la relativa esiguità della bibliografia’ dedicated to Piovene.³⁶

It is true that the authors examined in this dissertation show a non-normative approach to writing and a tendency to mix high and low culture, which is one of the distinguishing features of postmodern literature. They engage with ‘marginal’ literary genres (notably, crime fiction and travel writing) and with the popular press, as in the case of Bianciardi, while Volponi inaugurates a minor literary trend, *allegorismo*, in Italian literature of those years.³⁷ In employing formats such as the detective story and reportage, these writers have contributed to shifting the boundaries of the literary canon in the post-war years. The authors’ non-identification with the canon – especially evident in the cases of Bianciardi, Volponi, Ortese and Scerbanenco (the latter, in particular, being very different from the conventional figure of Italian writer) – needs to be read not so much in terms of opposition to the literary establishment, for they are still part of a certain high or, at least, official culture (Fruttero & Lucentini are editors with Einaudi), but rather inasmuch as they cannot be associated with the dominant literary trends and aesthetics of the time. They try, so to speak, to find their own way of overcoming the opposition between tradition and modernity, specific to Italian culture of the time. Arbasino, a leading exponent of the *Neoavanguardia*, represents an exception; however, as I argue in Chapter 4, it is partly for this reason that I have chosen to conclude my discussion with his *Fratelli d’Italia*.

Other Italian authors have, of course, engaged with the new realities of urbanisation and industrialisation. Amongst them, one can mention Lucio Mastronardi, Ottiero Ottieri, Goffredo Parise and Giovanni Testori. My authors are, however, more specifically tied to the urban environments of Milan and Turin, with the exception of Testori, whose cycle *I segreti di Milano* is firmly set within the Milanese periphery.³⁸ The Milan described by Testori is not the same city that one can find in *La vita agra*, with the vibrant intellectual neighbourhood of Brera and glittering skyscrapers. Testori

³⁶ Luciano Parisi, ‘I romanzi di Guido Piovene’, *Testo*, 41 (2001), 87-114 (p. 88). Among scholars who have produced relevant studies on the work of Piovene, Parisi mentions Jacques Goudet, Erika Kanduth, and Tibor Wlassics.

³⁷ Italian literary critics generally regard *Le mosche del capitale* ‘come la prima scrittura allegorica che attacca direttamente la società capitalistica moderna’ (Jansen, p. 275).

³⁸ The first book that Testori published as part of the cycle *I segreti di Milano* is *Il ponte della Ghisolfia* (1958), followed by the short story *La Gilda del Mac Mahon* (1959), the comedies *La Maria Brasca* (1960) and *L’Arialdia* (1960), and the novel *Il fabbricone* (1961).

concentrates, with a style that still owes much to realism,³⁹ on the ‘other’ Milan of the suburbs, the prostitutes and proletarians with little class-consciousness, who work in auto repair shops and small workshops. Finally, the most visible absence is perhaps that of Calvino. I was frequently asked, whenever I talked about my research, if Calvino is one of the authors that I am considering. This, I believe, is a symptom of the fact that the work of Calvino has circulated widely in Britain and, arguably, in the Anglo-American academic and intellectual contexts more generally. Without a doubt, Calvino is a defining figure in post-war Italian culture and an intellectual who has actively shaped the debate on socio-cultural changes through his literary works and articles published in Italy’s most prestigious newspapers, magazines, and literary journals. Arguably, among Calvino’s books, those that are more concerned with the transformations of post-war Italy are *Marcovaldo ovvero Le stagioni in città* (1963), which narrates the difficulties that the main character Marcovaldo experiences in adjusting to big city life, after leaving the countryside, *La speculazione edilizia* (1963), which addresses building speculation in the Ligurian Riviera, and *La nuvola di smog* (1958), which examines the issue of pollution, a rising concern in Italian society of those years. Moreover, a book that is commonly cited especially, but not exclusively, in relation to fictional geographies and the subject of the city in literature, is of course *Le città invisibili* (1972). Calvino’s views are in line with those expressed by authors such as Bianciardi and Volponi, in denouncing some of the downsides of modernisation (pollution, corruption, alienation of the big city), but he does so with a peculiar style that, in the books mentioned above, combines realism with elements of the fantastic and the fairy-tale. Moreover, Calvino’s work has received a great deal of critical attention and, therefore, his views have come to almost define – in Italy and outside – the literary response to that period. For this reason, this research seeks to foreground other authors and texts, which have not been as extensively read or discussed.

With respect to crime fiction, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini have led the way in the development of a strong topographical tradition within the contemporary Italian *noir* and *giallo*. It is therefore interesting to look at them as ‘matrix models’ in the discussion on crime literature and space, as well as in relation to ideas of canon and genre normativity, within the evolving intellectual context delineated above. Finally, with regard to travel literature, I explain in Chapter 4 why I have decided not to include travel accounts that are either concerned with a circumscribed

³⁹ See Marco Forti, ‘Temi industriali della narrativa italiana’, *Il Menabò*, 4 (1961), 213-239.

geographical territory or that belong more to the genres of the journalistic and ethnographic reportage. By contrast, the examples of Piovene, Ortese and Arbasino offer a compelling account of the changing socio-cultural landscape of the country, through their different yet complementary perspectives.

While this study certainly does not exhaust the topic, it contributes to the understanding of the Italian post-war transition, its ambiguities and implications for future socio-political developments, by combining an innovative selection of authors and literary materials, which cross genre boundaries and reflect an array of narrative positions, with the specific perspective on space. The focus on literature and space helps to highlight some key issues, such as, on the one hand, the failure to elaborate the past which results in the persistence, in post-war Italian society, of some ‘pathological’ attitudes and practices, and, on the other, the development of new critical voices in contemporary Italian literature, which are able to problematise established modes of representation. The emphasis on space, moreover, allows a re-reading of the examined texts as located at the intersection of tradition and innovation, where some of the postmodern arguments and ideas can be read between the lines. The physical fabric of urban and provincial territory is apprehended in the selected writings as the stage where the tensions between tradition and change are tangibly played out, in terms of changing uses of spaces, construction and destruction, evolving infrastructure, and new architectural styles. Space itself is therefore a key protagonist (and antagonist) in all of the texts under scrutiny.

This Introduction has outlined the nucleus of the research, as well as the specificity of its contribution, and should be read in connection with the following chapter, which develops more fully the salient arguments of the dissertation, only sketched here. The Introduction, moreover, has explained the rationale behind the periodisation of the thesis and the corpus of authors and primary materials that have been selected, while Chapter 1 focuses more specifically on the theoretical approaches that inform textual analysis, providing a critical contextualisation of the research project in the literary review section. The latter shows how textual interpretation draws on cross-disciplinary fields of inquiry, which bring together literary texts and theory of literature, including urban studies, sociological and psychoanalytic approaches to the study of the city, historical research, postmodern theories, and gender and queer perspectives. Existing research on the Italian boom period has often highlighted the inconsistencies and problems of the post-war

modernisation process from a socio-economic and political point of view: in this dissertation, the analysis of literary texts through the perspective of humanist geography and cultural studies, also illuminates the impact on individuals and their psychological responses.

1. Literary Geographies of the Boom: A Critical Contextualisation

1.1 Overview of Argument and Methodological Approaches

The Introduction set out to explain the periodisation of the thesis and the selection of literary materials that will be examined in the following chapters of this dissertation. This chapter provides a more detailed overview of the central arguments underpinning the research and discusses more at length the historical and spatial approaches that interweave throughout the dissertation. For a comprehensive contextualisation of the thesis, the Introduction and Chapter 1 should therefore be considered together. The analysis of the historical framework of the dissertation, included in this introductory section of the chapter, is followed, in Section 1.2, by a closer examination of the cultural context in which the examined writers are writing, which coincides with the development of the postmodern discourse in Italy. I will then go on to outline the research questions (Section 1.3), before reviewing the main theories that support textual analysis throughout the thesis, in the concluding literary review section.

As was anticipated in the Introduction, this dissertation explores the socio-spatial transformations that were brought about, at the turn of the 1950s in Italy, by the unprecedented economic growth that follows the reconstruction of the immediate post-war period. The spatial transformations to which I refer, concern, on the one hand, metropolitan areas and the accelerated urbanisation that Italian society undergoes from the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, and, on the other, the changing socio-cultural landscape of the country, at the broader national level. Italy's physical territory and the perception of distances within it are transformed by widely improved road infrastructures that connect places (perhaps, we could even say worlds) that seemed distant from one another and are now more at hand than ever before, as well as by the mass production of automobiles and motor scooters by Fiat and other manufacturers.

The 1950s and 1960s are in many ways a turning point in modern Italian history. After twenty years of Fascist dictatorship, the disastrous outcome of the Second World

War and the efforts of the reconstruction period, in the early 1960s, Italy experiences a phase of unexpected economic development, which transforms the country from a traditionally agrarian and impoverished society, into one of Europe's largest industrial producers, especially in the automotive sector and electrical appliances industry.¹ The boom itself unfolds in just a handful of years (being conventionally dated 1958-1963), but the focus period of this dissertation has been extended as to also embrace the 1970s, in order to better emphasise the impact of spatial changes and the fact that they continue to inspire the imagination of Italian writers in the following decades. The long-range historical framework of the thesis, moreover, helps us to better understand the socio-historical context in which post-war economic growth has unfolded. Clearly, the boom does not happen overnight, but it is prepared by a specific set of circumstances.² Moreover, it can be argued that the post-war period contains the germ of some of the future developments of Italian society, and it is somehow a testing ground, in which models and practices that will persist in the following decades are generated.

By adopting this long-term perspective, I do not intend to negate the significance of the boom as an abrupt transition in Italy's recent history, nor to underestimate the swift changes that are brought about in Italians' aspirations and lifestyle. On the contrary, I share the idea that the very short period of time in which economic development takes place is one of the main peculiarities of the Italian boom. After the immediate aftermath of the war and the reconstruction years, hopes have been raised in Italian society, but economic recovery is still proceeding at a slow pace. The concentration and intensity of the post-war growth period in Italy are therefore especially remarkable, even against the backdrop of a Europe-wide economic development. Indeed, as Hainsworth and Caesar have observed, in post-war Italy, the transformations 'occurred more rapidly and in more concentrated a form probably than in any other European nation'.³ That being said, I believe that the long-range historical approach adopted in this dissertation highlights the

¹ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 215.

² Among these circumstances, Ginsborg points out the development of international trade from the 1950s to the 1970s. With specific regard to post-war Italy's economic growth, Ginsborg stresses other important factors, such as the end of protectionism, the influx of American capital, machinery and 'know-how' knowledge through the Marshal Aid plan, the discovery of new sources of energy (particularly gas and hydrocarbons in the Val Padana), and the low cost of labour which makes Italian industry competitive on the international market (pp. 212-14).

³ Michael Caesar and Peter Hainsworth, 'The Transformation of Post-War Italy', in *Writers and Society in Contemporary Italy: A Collection of Essays*, ed. by M. Caesar and P. Hainsworth (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1984), pp. 1-34 (p. 2).

complexity and controversies of Italy's post-war transition more effectively, by capturing, on the one hand, the persistence of institutions and practices dating back to the pre-war period and, on the other, by hinting at the historical connections between the post-war years and later developments of Italian society. Crainz's definition of 'paese mancato' reflects the idea of the missed opportunity for Italian post-war governments to deal with long-standing social issues, implement structural reforms and build a robust collective dimension.⁴ This failure gives way, on the one hand, to a culture of individualism and economic gain, and, on the other, to social dissatisfaction and increasing discontent that will explode into the conflicts of 1968, the mid-70s, and 1980s.⁵ The boom's controversial legacy may therefore be detected in the socio-political instability that besets Italy in the following decades, as well as in the widespread corruption of the Italian political and administrative systems, which is brought to public attention by the Tangentopoli scandal of the early 1990s. As Crainz puts it,

la radice dei processi e dei conflitti successivi (e forse del loro esito) sta insomma in larga misura nell'interazione di quegli elementi che appaiono chiaramente nello snodo del 1963-4: processi contraddittori ma potenti di modernizzazione; squilibri persistenti della società italiana, permanere di arretratezze culturali che improntano largamente le istituzioni del paese; fallimento di una politica riformatrice.⁶

In other words, post-war rapid modernisation finds Italian society largely unprepared and the achieved prosperity is not counterbalanced by an equal strengthening of the public and civic spheres through consistent reform projects. On the contrary, as Paul Ginsborg has observed, the boom lacks 'the dimension of collective responsibility' and therefore reinforces individualistic attitudes that are already present in Italian culture.⁷ It should be noted moreover, that the diffusion of more progressive, modern lifestyles in the 1950s and 1960s gradually transforms the institutions of family and Church, which had traditionally played a key role in promoting a sense of common belonging amongst Italians, causing widespread social disorientation.⁸

⁴ Crainz, *Paese mancato*, p. 19.

⁵ Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, p. xiii.

⁶ Crainz, *Paese mancato*, p. 30.

⁷ Ginsborg, p. 240.

⁸ Jennifer Burns, 'Founding Fathers: Giorgio Scerbanenco', in *Italian Crime Fiction*, ed. by G. Pieri (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), pp. 27-47 (p. 35).

Drawing on the research of prominent historians of contemporary Italy, such as Guido Crainz, Paul Ginsborg and John Foot, who has written extensively about contemporary Milan,⁹ this dissertation looks at the boom as a complex moment of transition and a controversial model of economic development, marked by the interaction of different processes of modernisation. There is no doubt that the boom brings advancements in Italian society, not only in terms of the increased wealth of an expanding middle class, but also with regard to the diffusion of more secularised cultural and leisure pastimes, which goes hand in hand with ‘a dramatic decline in the influence of the church’.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the autonomous and unregulated character of the boom, which is largely determined by the free play of the market, accounts for the inconsistencies and discrepancies that shape the process of economic development.¹¹ Some of Italy’s existing inequalities and territorial imbalances become deeper. This is especially the case with the traditional opposition between the North and South of the country: while, after the war, the leading Italian industries are overwhelmingly based in the North, the South still depends primarily on agriculture and other traditional activities.¹² The boom also accentuates the discrepancy between private and public consumption patterns, with a general tendency to allocate insufficient money and resources to public transport and the education and health sectors.¹³ It should be noted, moreover, that Italian society is of course neither static nor homogeneous, but rather hybrid and dynamic, and as such reacts to the transformations under way, prompting the emergence of further levels of inequalities.¹⁴ For this reason, Crainz argues that it is more appropriate to speak of plural Italies (‘diverse Italie’), rather than one single Italy, of the 1950s.¹⁵

Space is a central theme in this research, as will also become clear from the literature review section, which discusses the spatial theories supporting textual analysis. Literary texts and travel accounts capture the dual nature of space as factual and symbolic, by providing descriptions of concrete topographies and by steering imagination associated

⁹ I refer in particular to Foot’s *Milan Since the Miracle*, but also to Robert Lumley and John Foot (eds), *Italian Cityscapes: Culture and Urban Change in Contemporary Italy* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), a collection of essays dedicated to the subject of the Italian city from the 1950s to the present day, which Foot has co-edited with Lumley.

¹⁰ Ginsborg, p. 245.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 217-18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

¹⁴ Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, p. viii.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

to places, which in turn shapes them, both discursively and tangibly. The dialectical relationship between literature and the places it describes is therefore rich and fecund.¹⁶ As was outlined in the Introduction, Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation focus on novels that are strongly tied to the cities of Milan and Turin, while Chapter 4 discusses three samples of post-war Italian travel writing, adopting a pan-Italian perspective that complements the previous two chapters, by providing insights into different areas of the country. In contrast to the previous two chapters, centred on the industrialised North, Chapter 4 introduces the idea of margin, chiefly intended as the Italian South, which, at the time under scrutiny in this dissertation, is still largely agricultural. The descriptions of the South remind us that the other side of the rapidly burgeoning urban centres is the emptying countryside through poverty and emigration.

Albeit proto-industrial endeavours, in Milan and Turin, may be traced back to the early twentieth century, the two cities do not develop into important industrial centres until the rise of capitalist economy in Italy in the early 1960s. The delay in the development of a modern capitalist city in Italy is considerable, especially when compared to metropolises such as London and Paris, which are already large conurbations at the end of the eighteenth century, in conjunction with the industrial advancement of England and France. Up until the 1960s, Italy is still an agrarian society facing enduring problems, such as the traditional underdevelopment of the South, as well as centuries of fragmentation and local rivalries, given that the country only achieves unity in 1861. The fact that, in the texts examined in this dissertation, post-war economic growth is generally perceived as a historical rupture, while rapid urbanisation prompts feelings of disorientation, if not open hostility, towards the modern city (this being especially the case with Bianciardi and Volponi in Chapter 2), may be seen as a consequence of the delayed urban transition in Italy. The novels and travel accounts examined in this dissertation are more inclined to denounce the idiosyncrasies of the process of modernisation and to expose the downsides of post-war urbanisation, which in the mythologisation of the boom era, often tend to be forgotten.

¹⁶ Fiorentino argues that ‘lo spazio che consideriamo reale si produce sempre da questa tensione, da questa dialettica tra l’esperienza dei luoghi del mondo e le loro rappresentazioni’ and that ‘i luoghi esistono – prevalentemente forse – in forza dell’immaginario che essi producono e da cui poi sono ri-prodotti. Lo studio delle topografie letterarie è in buona parte studio di questo scambio incessante tra la scrittura letteraria e lo spazio geografico che agisce sui testi e dentro i testi in cui è incluso o anche escluso, taciuto o descritto, sognato, meditato’. Francesco Fiorentino, ‘Verso una geostoria della letteratura’, in *Letteratura e geografia: atlanti, modelli, letture*, ed. by F. Fiorentino and C. Solivetti (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2012), pp. 13-44 (pp. 15, 16).

It is worth noting that feelings of hostility toward the modern city pertain, more broadly, to Western culture and to those philosophical stances that, at least from Romanticism onwards, have sought to oppose the dominion of reason established by the Enlightenment, by lamenting the disappearance of nature as a source of energy and creativity in modern city life.¹⁷ Accordingly, in Romantic literature, and subsequently with literary modernism, the modern city has often been portrayed as a site of alienation and social anomie.¹⁸ Similar views have also been supported by the early sociological studies of Simmel, Weber and Durkheim, which have addressed the psychopathology of metropolitan life.¹⁹ Arguably, amongst Italian writers of the post-war period, such views are exacerbated by the central role played, in post-war urbanisation, by building speculation and lust for self-enrichment, which often gain the upper hand over efforts to create sustainable and liveable cities. It is, of course, equally important not to underestimate the liberating potentiality of urbanised lifestyles. In post-war Italian society, this is particularly evident in the case of women and young people, who are in many instances able to take advantage of the new opportunities and social dynamism offered by metropolitan life. The cause of emancipation of Italian women, in particular, receives a great boost in the post-war years, when a large number of women find employment in the booming industrial sectors of the North, and those coming from the Italian South have the opportunity to emancipate from their patriarchal background.²⁰ We will return to this again later in the following chapters.

1.2 Cultural Context

Luperini has observed that ‘la condizione postmoderna comincia a essere avvertita, in Italia, già durante il cosiddetto “miracolo economico”, ma si afferma in modo chiaro solo

¹⁷ Richard Lehan. *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. xv.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-72.

¹⁹ See in particular Georg Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. and trans. by K. H. Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), pp. 409-24; and Max Weber, *The City*, ed. and trans. by D. Martindale and G. Neuwirth (New York: Free Press, 1968).

²⁰ Ginsborg, p. 224, 244.

a partire dagli anni Settanta'.²¹ As was pointed out in the Introduction, the historical framework of this dissertation coincides, indeed, with the slow gestation of postmodern ideas and arguments in the Italian intellectual debate and literary production, from the second half of the 1950s and throughout the following decades, with a more systematic consolidation in the 1980s. The economic and socio-cultural changes of the late 1950s give the first blow to the opposition, championed by the Italian intellectual establishment, between high and popular culture, chiefly due to the expansion of a wealthier and cultivated middle class, and therefore to access to money and culture, granted to considerably larger sections of the Italian population. Literature is directly affected by these social changes, and writers and publishers respond in various ways to 'the need to renegotiate the relations between elite and popular (or mass) culture'.²² Umberto Eco was certainly one of the most acute observers of these transformations, as well as an active protagonist in the modernisation of Italian culture through his prolific production of novels and critical essays. Already in *Opera aperta* (1962) and subsequently in *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964), Eco tackles issues such as the hybridisation of forms of culture in contemporary societies, and explores the extent to which the opposition between popular culture as genuine and autonomous, and mass culture as merely the expression of (American) capitalist ideology, has been brought into question by post-war socio-cultural transformations.²³ *Apocalittici e integrati* also introduced the distinction that has become canonical, between the intellectuals that reject altogether stylistic and conceptual innovations (apocalyptic), and the opposing group of intellectuals that, on the contrary, salute the efforts of renewal enthusiastically, often showing a lack of critical judgement (integrated).

Here, Eco was calling into question traditional cultural categories and deep-rooted assumptions about what constitutes good literature. Thus, unsurprisingly, his arguments sparked heated debate amongst Italian intellectuals.²⁴ Especially the idea that mass culture can be an object of critical and literary analysis, alongside more sophisticated subject

²¹ Romano Luperini, *Controtempo: critica e letteratura fra moderno e postmoderno: proposte, polemiche e bilanci di fine secolo* (Naples, Liguori, 1999), p. 170.

²² Caesar and Caesar, p. 9.

²³ Zygmunt G. Barański and Robert Lumley, 'Turbulent Transitions: An Introduction', in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy: Essays on Mass and Popular Culture*, ed. by Barański and Lumley (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 1-17 (p 12).

²⁴ See Eco's reconstruction of the reception of *Opera aperta* and *Apocalittici e integrati* in later editions of these works. Specifically, *Opera aperta*, 3rd edn (Milan: Bompiani, 1976), and *Apocalittici e integrati*, 7th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 1988).

matters, was generally met with scornful replies. Scholars of contemporary Italian culture and society have stressed the predominantly negative connotation that mass culture has in Italy. Since Fascism and subsequently with the post-war Christian Democrat governments, in years in which Italian civil society is largely controlled by the opposing institutions of the Catholic Church and Italian Communist Party, mass culture has indeed been associated with ideas of indoctrination from the top down, uniformity and passivity.²⁵ Popular culture has instead been considered as an equivalent of folklore, that is, the genuine culture of the people, whose production and consumption cannot be imposed from above. Thus, while mass culture evokes ‘falsehood’ and refers mostly to cultural products embodying the American hegemonic model, popular culture retains an ‘aura of authenticity’.²⁶ Nevertheless, Forgacs and Gundle have also underscored the impact of mass media communication in increasing participation and socio-political awareness, and in challenging conservative views of gender and sexuality.²⁷ In the Italian case, moreover, mass media have contributed to foster a sense of community and belonging.²⁸ Forgacs’ and Gundle’s approach allows greater flexibility in the analysis of the rise of mass culture in Italy and shows that, as much as there were attempts by the post-war governments to control social and cultural life, they did not result in the imposition of a single cultural model or notion of truth. This also means that the recipient, or cultural consumer, is not passive: on the contrary, meaning is always negotiated and stratified, leaving room for forms of resistance.²⁹

While a consistent and coherent framework of postmodern theories is yet to emerge, in Italy, in the years surveyed in this dissertation, the privileged status of highbrow culture has already been shaken, paving the way for the far-reaching cultural turn. The texts included in this research bear witness to this cultural unrest, suggesting that the authors are already writing in a postmodern society, in which all-encompassing narratives have been delegitimised and the old, familiar world has turned more uncanny and inhospitable, with the accelerated pace of transformations in the global societies that have emerged after the end of World War II. As seen in the Introduction, the examined

²⁵ David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 1-2.

²⁶ Barański and Lumley, pp. 10-12.

²⁷ Forgacs and Gundle, p. 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁹ Foot supports this thesis against Pasolini’s idea of an ‘anthropological mutation’ occurring in post-war Italian society (pp. 21-23).

texts are situated at the intersection of modernity and postmodernity: a transition in which dominant motives of modernity are still present, also due to the later development (in Italy, compared to other European countries, such as England and France) of urbanisation and industrialisation, which are two fundamental themes of modernity and modern art. The coexistence of innovation and tradition, specific to post-war Italian culture, may also be read in relation to Jameson's notion of cultural dominant as a predominant aesthetics or cultural paradigm that emerge within a given historical context and always imply the persistence of residual forms of culture, namely 'a range of very different, yet subordinate, features'.³⁰

Postmodern thought has been met with resistance, if not open hostility, in Italy, a country in which the classical tradition has in many ways shaped the idea of legitimate culture. Moreover, in light of what has been said above, it becomes clear that widespread scepticism toward the inclusion of popular culture in critical inquiry was also ideological. Monica Jansen has retraced the process of slow assimilation of postmodernism in Italy, stressing how the formulations of postmodern thinkers, such as Jameson, Deleuze, Habermas and Lyotard, have from the beginning found a fertile ground for discussion in Italy's philosophical debate. Vattimo's weak-thought philosophy, in particular, represents an attempt to re-orient Italian contemporary philosophy toward the relativism of postmodern theory, in opposition to dominant ideologies.³¹ Italian architecture also incorporates postmodern ideas from an early stage, mostly through the Post-Modern movement of Charles Jencks.³² Jansen, moreover, has stressed the interdisciplinarity of Italian postmodernism, which is characterised by the interaction between different disciplines, which evolve concurrently.³³ Thus, for instance, the philosophical debate has influenced literary criticism, as reflected by the discussion carried out in contemporary literary journals, such as *Alfabeta* and *Il Verri*.³⁴ The two literary movements of the *Neoavanguardia* and, in poetry, the *Gruppo 93* (the latter created in 1989) deserve a separate discussion, as a peculiar re-articulation of postmodern poetics and stylistics. Indeed, on the one hand, these movements insert themselves into the Italian literary tradition with its specific traits (such as, for instance, the crisis of the social function of

³⁰ Jameson, p. 4.

³¹ Jansen, p. 14.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

literature and the consequent emphasis on matters of style and linguistic experimentation)³⁵ and, on the other, they negotiate and incorporate questions emerging from the broader international debate about the transformations of mass society. At the same time, it is true, as Luperini has noted, that the *Neoavanguardia* is still tied to the modernist framework in its declared intention of breaking with the past, which sounds somewhat incongruous in the contemporary world, where all forms of culture, including those deviating from the norm, have been commodified.³⁶ As Jameson puts it, one of the key features of the postmodern condition is the effacement

of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture, and the emergence of new kinds of texts infused with the forms, categories, and contents of that very culture industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern.³⁷

The writers included in this dissertation express these tensions through their perspective on urban changes and national spatial issues. As mentioned in the Introduction, space is assigned new centrality within the postmodern turn theorised, among others, by Jameson, Lefebvre, Deleuze, and Soja, through the rejection of historical grand narratives, centred on the idea of universal and linear progression of history. The writers examined here retain a somewhat elitist stance, especially in their anti-urban views, but, at the same time, introduce stylistic and thematic innovations. For instance, the work of Ortese and Arbasino opens up new epistemological paths, through gendered and queer perspectives that question accepted notions of space, intertwined with issues of gender and sexuality. *Fratelli d'Italia* plays with linguistic experimentalism and references to the past (one of the distinguishing features of Italian postmodern literature), specifically the tradition of the Grand Tour, though this is clearly re-semanticised. Chapters 2 and 3 also reflect a movement toward the postmodern condition, through the rejection of the absolute value of rationality, coupled with the idea of 'clean' and totalitarian space, which stems from the modernist utopia of urban order and reflects a certain configuration of politico-economic power. In this respect, the texts act as a

³⁵ Ibid., p. 239.

³⁶ Jansen observes that 'il linguaggio antimimetico della sperimentazione linguistica della neoavanguardia [...] non può più manifestarsi come rottura dal momento in cui tutte le deviazioni dalla norma tentate dalle avanguardie sono state riassorbite dai linguaggi e dalle tecniche pubblicitarie' (p. 216).

³⁷ Jameson, p. 2.

reminder of the irrational forces that exist in the urban environment, despite attempts to negate and control them, particularly with the development of mercantilist-capitalist economy and the philosophy of the Enlightenment, whose ‘principal legacy [...] can be found in the search for rationality, foundations and universal truths’.³⁸ Postmodernism has questioned the idea of rational space: similarly, the texts examined here oppose post-war Italy’s model of urban modernity through their emphasis on resistance and appropriation of urban spaces, as well as on the unfathomable elements of the urban environment. Finally, the selection of genres in this dissertation, documents the collapse of genre normativity in the post-war years, as well as, crucially, the dissolution of the historically constructed, and often assumed, opposition between low and high literature.

1.3 Research Questions

The following hypotheses, or research questions, emerge from what has been discussed so far. They address in particular the idea of the boom as historical shift that encompasses both continuity and change, tradition and innovation, and the ambiguous feelings associated with this transition. How do the examined texts respond to and document post-war Italy’s transition through their narration of the country’s changing socio-cultural landscape? What images of post-war Italy emerge? What key issues and controversies? Can we talk about a historical uncanny in relation to the anxiety about post-war Italy’s rapid urbanisation as investigated in Chapters 2 and 3? Do similar images and feelings also permeate the travel accounts that describe the transformations of the national landscape, explored in Chapter 4? Finally, do the deep intellectual crisis and moral disorientation that follow the fall of Fascism and end of World War II, account for the search, among the examined authors, of alternative modes of representation and for the new idea of travel that emerge in Italian travel accounts of the post-war period? The literature review to follow presents the theoretical framework that, throughout the dissertation, allows us to address these questions.

³⁸ Dear, p. 4.

1.4 Literature Review

The historical approach adopted in this dissertation, which situates the examined texts within the specific cultural and historical context of post-war Italy, is complemented by theories of space that have been developed in the fields of urban studies and human geography. This section of the chapter provides a theoretical foundation to the research project, by reviewing the main theories that underpin each of the following chapters and by providing an overview of the different fields of enquiry that articulate the approach of the thesis to the research questions outlined above.

1.4.1 Authoritarian City

Chapter 2 discusses the idea of authoritarian city through the work of Luciano Bianciardi and Paolo Volponi, who provide particularly interesting insights into the urban transition of the 1960s, from a perspective that is informed by the direct knowledge of the Northern industrial system: Volponi having worked as an industrial manager at both Fiat and Olivetti, and Bianciardi by means of his first-hand experience of the Milanese publishing industry. At the same time, Volponi and Bianciardi observe the urban-industrial society of the North from the point of view of outsiders who come from the small-town environment of Central Italy (Le Marche and Tuscany, respectively) and therefore perceive the changes underway all the more acutely. In Chapter 2, I analyse how Bianciardi's and Volponi's work engages with contemporary social issues, by choosing the industrial city as the focus of the criticism of post-war capitalism and the model of urbanism associated with it. More specifically, the chapter concentrates on Bianciardi's *La vita agra* and Volponi's *Memoriale*, both published in 1962 and respectively set in Milan and Turin. The analysis of *Memoriale* is enriched with some reflections from *Le mosche del capitale*, a later novel by Volponi, which provides a perfect complement and, it may be argued, almost a sequel to *Memoriale*, for the reasons that will be discussed in the following chapter. As was clarified in the Introduction, *Le mosche del capitale* was written during the 1970s, when the story is set, and subsequently revised by Volponi. Thus, not only does it prove relevant for the discussion carried out in this dissertation, but

demonstrates once more the long-term impact of urban changes on the imagination of Italian writers.

Chapter 2 examines Milan and Turin as symbolic and geographical centres of Italy's new industrial geography; centres of power and wealth where political and economic elites have aligned. In the novels under scrutiny, totalitarian tendencies become manifest in modern buildings and through the new spatial layout, which promotes movement and productivity, while limiting forms of social aggregation and expressions of individuality. If indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, the act of walking is a way of appropriating space, a type of urban planning that limits the walkability of the city arguably encourages uniformity and alienates urban dwellers from their built environment. A further idea that emerges from the novels examined in Chapter 2, is that of a city that has become a sort of appendix to industry, predicated as it is on the values of profit and utilitarianism. As such, the modern industrial city poses new and specific problems of regulation, and requires new forms of social control, as is discussed in the concluding section of the chapter. Throughout Chapter 2, textual examples are framed within theories of spatial organisation as constitutive of power, which reinforce the main points emerging from literary analysis. More specifically, I make use of a set of theories developed by Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault, whose work has been pivotal in deconstructing the idea of space as a neutral milieu and emphasising, instead, its active role in perpetuating relations of hegemony and power.

Foucault has traced the evolution of mechanisms of power, that is, the techniques that power adopts to secure and maintain the dominant social order, from the Middle Ages to contemporary societies, with a special focus on modern developments. Thus, he demonstrates that power techniques have always existed, but in mostly isolated and fragmented forms until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when they are organised into a comprehensive system, aimed at controlling the population as a whole.³⁹ Foucault argues that, at that point in history, there can be registered a shift from discipline to security, namely to a new system of power involved with the control of individuals and their conducts (or behaviours). From these considerations, Foucault derives his theory of bio-politics, based on the idea that, in modern societies, power is exercised over the

³⁹ Michel Foucault, 'The Incorporation of the Hospital into Modern Technology', in *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography*, ed. by J. W. Crampton and S. Elden (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 141-52 (p. 146).

population as a biological entity, in order to enhance its productivity and efficiency, which ultimately responds to the need of political and economic power to perpetuate itself. It has been fittingly pointed out that spatial issues run as an underlying concern throughout Foucault's analyses of power and knowledge, providing the backbone of his research, even when he makes no explicit mention of geography.⁴⁰ Indeed, in all of Foucault's analyses of power, spatial configuration is crucial for it to attain specific purposes, since strategic spatial arrangements are essential for power to be exercised continuously and homogeneously over the whole of a given territory.⁴¹ Foucault has also examined the role of architectural configurations, most famously the archetypical model of the Panopticon that will be discussed in Chapter 2, in managing and regulating the conducts of individuals. His work proves therefore crucial in the context of the next chapter, in which post-war Milan and Turin are examined as sites of power and discipline. It may indeed be argued that specific criteria of spatial distribution, aiming at maximising efficiency and instilling quiescence in a population that seems to have become more malleable, apply to the Milan described by Bianciardi, to the factory environment of *Memoriale*, as well as to Bovino, the industrial city portrayed in *Le mosche del capitale*. Foucault's notion of bio-politics is especially relevant in the concluding section of Chapter 2, which focuses on examples of social control in the urban environments described by Bianciardi and Volponi.

Lefebvre's research proves particularly versatile in the context of this dissertation, for it is concerned with both the 'rational, state-dominated and bureaucratic'⁴² space of capitalist societies, and the symbolic level of mythical and fictional spaces. In other words, it considers both the material and the elusive, underground aspects of urban space, which represent, respectively, the focus of Chapters 2 and 3. Lefebvre's analyses therefore provide a thread of continuity for the argument developed in these two chapters, linking them together. Particularly relevant for both chapters is the idea that, as much as state power tries to configure space for its purposes, often having recourse to violent means, the latter is never fully controllable. As we shall see in Chapter 2, according to

⁴⁰ Jeremy W. Crampton and Stuart Elden, 'Introduction', in *Space, Knowledge and Power*, ed. by Crampton and Elden, pp. 1-16 (pp. 8-9).

⁴¹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, ed. by M. Senellart and trans. by G. Burchell (New York: Picador, 2009), pp. 13-14.

⁴² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 231.

Lefebvre, the industrial buildings and monuments that ‘exude arrogance’,⁴³ operate as a constant reminder of the violence of state power. Compared to Foucault, Lefebvre is more interested in the lived space of everyday social activities. In fact, he is critical of the common idea of space as a mental construct and calls for a unitary theory that includes the analysis of social practices in space, in order to investigate how urban dwellers can effectively appropriate their built environment.⁴⁴ Lefebvre’s *Production of Space* examines how, throughout history, social groups have manipulated and shaped the natural environment through their activities, focusing in particular on modern capitalist societies, from the development of mercantilism to the rise of the neo-capitalist city. Chapter 2 draws especially on Lefebvre’s analysis of the capitalistic mode of production of space and its corollary of space colonisation, namely the idea that, in modern societies, capital has expanded to occupy everyday life. The analysis in Chapter 2 also draws on the logic of visualisation, namely Lefebvre’s theory of the eye as the predominant means of knowledge, which begins with the discovery of linear perspective in the Renaissance.⁴⁵ A geometrical and measurable space is useful to a mercantile society and, indeed, its creation coincides with the development of commercial capital in the Italian city-states.⁴⁶ The eye objectifies and the centrality that is assigned to it in the later stages of financial capitalism, contributes to the de-materialisation of an increasingly abstract space.⁴⁷

One may argue that other scholars who have also explored issues of power and space could have been taken into consideration. I refer especially to David Harvey, Michael Dear, Manuel Castells and Sharon Zukin, who have generally positioned the economic question at the heart of their geographical explorations.⁴⁸ A similar observation could be made in relation to scholars who have taken Foucault’s work forward, such as, for example, Miles Ogborn, who has drawn on Foucault’s theories to investigate the regulation of urban behaviours, mostly focusing on the beginning of the modern era.⁴⁹ It is interesting to mention, moreover, that recent studies have raised the question of the Panopticon city, based on the idea that modern technologies of surveillance, such as the CCTV cameras widespread in our modern cities, have turned the city itself into a

⁴³ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁴⁵ Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 389.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 390.

⁴⁷ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 98.

⁴⁸ Gregory, pp. 97-98.

⁴⁹ See for instance Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London’s Geographies, 1680-1780* (New York: Guilford, 1998).

panopticon.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, I have chosen to limit my analysis largely to Foucault and Lefebvre, to maintain a linear structure and coherent argumentation throughout Chapter 2. Indeed, Foucault and Lefebvre provide the chapter with a consistent theoretical framework, by supporting literary interpretation through their analyses of power underpinned by spatial concerns. In the case of Lefebvre in particular, the versatility of his analyses provides continuity between Chapters 2 and 3, therefore rendering the argument of the research project as a whole more coherent and unified. In addition to this, I have chosen not to base my research on studies that mainly carry out an economic analysis of space, which is the case with ‘radical geography, for Harvey and for many others’,⁵¹ given that this dissertation is not primarily or exclusively concerned with the economic implications of Italian post-war changes. The same goes for research that addresses postmodern space specifically, since I am considering here a space and literature that are, so to say, in between, and I am therefore not primarily interested in a detailed analysis of the characteristic features of postmodern space, as has been carried out, for example, by Castells, Zukin and Soja. It should be noted, however, that these issues are touched upon in Section 1.2 of this chapter, where I also refer explicitly to scholars whose work has given a significant contribution to the field of human geography, including Harvey, Jameson and Deleuze.

The spatial theories elaborated in Chapter 2 have a solid historical grounding, which sheds light on the specificity of the Italian case in the time frame under scrutiny. The historic and spatial perspectives interweave throughout the chapter, showing that the idea of authoritarian city emerging from the texts is tied to the particular moment in which the texts are produced. The chapter’s historic approach is centred on the idea of a survived continuity with the past, and particularly with the Fascist mentality: a theory that has been supported by prominent historians of contemporary Italy, including Guido Crainz, Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mirco Dondi, on the basis of the argument that a political purge of elements of the Fascist period was never carried out and that, actually, these ended up infiltrating the institutions of the Italian Republic. As stressed several times in this

⁵⁰ See for example Hille Koshela, “‘The Gaze Without Eyes’: Video-surveillance and the Changing Nature of Urban Space’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 24.2 (2000), 243-65. Other scholars partly disagree with the idea of the Panopticon city, despite acknowledging that CCTV cameras have become pervasive in contemporary urban environments. See in particular Michael McCahill, *The Surveillance Web: The Rise of Visual Surveillance in an English City* (Devon: Willan Press, 2001); and Clive Norris and Gary Armstrong, *The Maximum Surveillance Society: The Rise of CCTV* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

⁵¹ Gregory, p. 88.

chapter, a central idea of this dissertation and key premise of the research questions outlined above, is that of the post-war period as complex transition: an historical fracture, but also a moment that contains legacies from the past and seeds of the future developments of Italian society. The novels of Bianciardi and Volponi are seen as rooted in this crucial moment of Italian history, and as such, shaping a certain account of Italian post-war modernisation. In this sense, the critical and hostile point of view expressed by Bianciardi and Volponi in regard to urban changes, is partly the result of the fact that they write in the midst of transformations that are difficult to accommodate. Moreover, feelings of disorientation emerging from the texts, may be associated with the idea of historical uncanny, linked to Italy's troubled relationship with its past, which is at the core of Chapter 3.

1.4.2 Uncanny City

Chapter 3, 'Uncanny City', also explores the defining anxiety of the Italian post-war years; however, it does so from a psychoanalytical, rather than historico-political, angle, by developing the theme of Italy's unresolved relation with its past through the re-emergence of the collective historical unconscious in the sites and buildings of the industrial cities of the North. In the era of global capitalism, modern Milan and Turin may be seen as embodying an idea of functional space, which opposes the irrational drives that also exist in the city. Chapter 3 examines how this underground life of the city resurfaces, by focusing, through the lens of crime fiction, on urban aspects that evoke feelings of estrangement and uneasiness. The chapter looks, more specifically, at a series of crime novels written by Giorgio Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini, which, like the texts analysed in the previous chapter, are also respectively set in Milan and Turin. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, where I sketch a brief history of the Italian crime fiction genre, Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini mark a turning point in the tradition of the Italian *giallo*, thanks to the vast popularity enjoyed by their novels. Up until the 1960s, in Italy, crime fiction is widely regarded as a marginal genre and consists primarily of translations of foreign classics, mostly from the Anglo-American tradition.⁵² The fact

⁵² Giuliana Pieri, 'Introduction', in *Italian Crime Fiction*, ed. by Pieri, pp. 1-5 (p. 1).

that Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini choose to set their crime stories in the concrete setting of the Milan and Turin of the 1960s and 1970s, represents another significant element of novelty. The relevance of the urban setting has indeed varied in the history of the Italian crime genre, also due to the censorial attitude of the Fascist regime towards detective stories set in Italy, as we shall see in Chapter 3.⁵³ Following Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini, Italian crime literature develops a strong geographical connotation, giving rise to specific local traditions.⁵⁴ Like Bianciardi and Volponi, Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini engage with the contradictions of life in post-war Italy and denounce the undesirable consequences of the boom, challenging dominant accounts of prosperity and optimism, after the austerity of the war and immediate post-war years. Chapter 3 develops further the issue raised in the previous chapter, of the anxiety provoked by the post-war shift in Italy, by seeing it as linked, on the one hand, to the re-emergence of a bad past and, on the other, to feelings of disorientation, resulting from the speed of the transformations under way.

The chapter explores the connections between urban space, crime fiction, and the uncanny, in the frame of Italy's post-war economic boom and accelerated urbanisation, by drawing on theories developed, among others, by Lefebvre, Benjamin and Lehan in his study of the city in modern literature. The uncanny is a key notion in the discussion in Chapter 3, especially in the interpretation that has been given by Vidler, as a response to the trauma of modernity, which becomes tangible in architecture and urban space.⁵⁵ In his study of the uncanny, Vidler argues that this 'quintessentially bourgeois kind of fear'⁵⁶ has been at the heart of architectural representations since the end of the eighteenth century: while the haunted house is a recurring theme in Romantic literature, with the rise of the modern metropolis at the end of the following century, the uncanny moves from the home interior to the interior of the mind and gains further connotations, coinciding

⁵³ Luca Covi, *Tutti i colori del giallo: il giallo italiano da De Marchi a Scerbanenco a Camilleri* (Venice, Marsilio, 2002), p. 44.

⁵⁴ Many studies have concentrated on the topographical connotation that Italian crime fiction develops at least from the late 1960s onwards. Massimo Carloni, for instance, maintains that, especially in the period of time that goes from 1966 to 1978 'gli autori che esordiscono o ritornano alla narrativa d'indagine trovano nella connessione tra vicenda poliziesca e ambientazione metropolitana e provinciale un nucleo irrinunciabile e caratterizzante attorno al quale costruire i loro romanzi'. Massimo Carloni, *L'Italia in giallo: geografia e storia del giallo italiano contemporaneo* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2006), p. 12. The first part of Carloni's *L'Italia in giallo* is organised into chapters that are dedicated to specific places: 'Milano', 'Provincia', 'Roma', 'Torino', and 'Bologna e Napoli'.

⁵⁵ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (London: The MIT Press, 1992).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

with ‘metropolitan illness’.⁵⁷ Big-city life imposes a revolution in the way people perceive and experience their environment: a transformation that is spatially embodied by the ‘newly scaled spaces’ of the modern city, as well as by the ‘disturbingly heterogeneous crowds’ that invade the city streets.⁵⁸ The uncanny sensibility therefore manifests itself as dilatation and distortion of the contours of the familiar. Since Freud’s theorisation in his 1919 seminal essay, the notion of uncanniness has retained a prismatic nature, comprising a range of feelings of unease and estrangement that relate to ‘a fundamental insecurity brought about by “a lack of orientation”, a sense of something new, foreign, and hostile invading an old, familiar, customary world’.⁵⁹ In Chapter 3, textual analysis shows that something similar happens with the rapid transformation of Italian society in the boom period.

The uncanny is deeply rooted in urban history and the same may be said about crime literature. The latter was also born out of the great city and the new concentration of people and things that leads to a rise in violent crimes and the constitution of an institutionalised police force.⁶⁰ The aesthetics of fear and estrangement, a province of the uncanny, is also at home in mystery and detective stories. Therefore, we can see that there is close interconnectedness between crime fiction, the rise of the modern city and feelings of uncanniness. Benjamin has identified a specific link between the development of crime fiction and the surge of metropolitan crowds, which evoke ideas of anonymity and impunity. Indeed, the new sense of freedom that individuals experience in the great city, be it freedom to go unnoticed or to actually commit crimes, is, according to Benjamin, ‘at the origin of the detective story.’⁶¹ To put it in Benjamin’s words, ‘the original social content of the detective story focused on the obliteration of the individual’s traces in the big-city crowd.’⁶² Arguably for the first time in history, in the big city, people walk past each other and travel together by public transport, yet ever remaining strangers. The crowd with its fluctuating physiognomy, permeates the urban fiction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most notably the writings of Baudelaire, Poe, and Dickens, which document how, in the context of rising Paris and London, this somewhat disturbing entity

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. ix-x, 4-6.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁰ Barbara Pezzotti, *The Importance of Place in Italian Contemporary Crime Fiction: A Bloody Journey* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press; Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), p. 7.

⁶¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. by M. W. Jennings, trans. by H. Eiland and others (London: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 72.

⁶² Ibid.

comes to archetypically embody the Other.⁶³ In this regard, Lehan has observed that the idea of the man of the crowd as threat at the turn of the twentieth century, needs to be read as well in the ambit of nation-states that at the time were fighting the advance of totalitarianism.⁶⁴

The crowd, however, is not only menacing: it also can offer protection. For instance, the literary type of the flâneur – which enjoys a great vogue in nineteenth-century Paris, in conjunction with the rise of the department stores, grand boulevards, and first gas lighting⁶⁵ – finds in city crowds a source of vitality and inspiration. For the flâneur, the colourful bustle of the city streets has the same exhilarating effect of the *panoramas*, which are becoming popular in Paris in the same years.⁶⁶ As Benjamin puts it,

The flâneur still stands on the threshold – of the metropolis as of the middle class. Neither has him in its power yet. In neither is he at home. He seeks refuge in the crowd. [...] The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city beckons to the flâneur as phantasmagoria – now a landscape, now a room.⁶⁷

The flâneur, who anticipates some of the traits of the modern big-city dweller, sees the strange and unfamiliar as an antidote against the *spleen* of bourgeois life. The uncanny can, therefore, also become an inspiration for artistic experimentation and it has indeed been a source of creativity, especially for the avant-gardes.⁶⁸

Chapter 3 draws on a set of theories that reject the identity between space and rationality, engrained in Western spatial thinking since the nineteenth century,⁶⁹ by emphasising how the uncontrollable flow of life continues to operate underneath the institutional city. A product of the Enlightenment, the modern city was supposed to stand

⁶³ Benjamin writes that ‘Poe’s famous tale “The Man of the Crowd” is something like an X-ray of a detective story. It does away with all the drapery that a crime represents. Only the armature remains: the pursuer, the crowd, and an unknown man who manages to walk through London in such a way that he always remains in the middle of the crowd’ (p. 79).

⁶⁴ Lehan, p. 3.

⁶⁵ David Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity: Critical Explorations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p. 31.

⁶⁶ Benjamin, pp. 33-34.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁶⁸ Vidler, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 164. Gregory comments that ‘in the course of the nineteenth century dominant conceptions of space installed within the political imaginary of the West a presumptive identity between “rationality” and “space”; that the one was inscribed within the other’ (p. 137).

as the bulwark of society: the rational organisation of people and functions of public life, as opposed to the state of nature.⁷⁰ This, however, appears to be an illusion, since space eludes total control. As a consequence, those irrational drives and spatial fears that urbanists and social theorists of the eighteenth century have sought to suppress, have continued to operate within the city, challenging its rational principle.⁷¹ Lehan has explored the ways in which this archetypical struggle between urban order and disorder has manifested in the course of history:⁷² from the figure of Dionysus in Greek mythology to carnivalesque rituals; and from the mob of the modern metropolis, perceived as a threat, to the Freudian notion of the uncanny as return of the repressed.⁷³

Official representations of urban space as functional and controllable therefore collide with the innate energy of the city, which, in spite of attempts to repress it, continues to define urban life. In this respect, Lefebvre argues that

Today urban space appears in two lights: on the one hand it is replete with places which are holy and damned, devoted to the male principle or the female, rich in fantasies and phantasmagorias; on the other hand it is rational, state-dominated and bureaucratic, its monumentality degraded and obscured by traffic of every kind, including the traffic of information.⁷⁴

Lehan echoes these reflections, by identifying two spheres that concur to shape modern urban life: on the one hand, the official, rational space of state power and, on the other, the underground, often repressed, life of the city. As he puts it,

There are always two cities at work: one visible, the other invisible; one of the surface, the other underground or hidden; one a realm of mastery and control, the other of mystery and turmoil.⁷⁵

The city ultimately contains both principles, rational and irrational, and urban existence is inevitably involved with a degree of unpredictability. This may explain why anxiety

⁷⁰ Lehan, p. 3.

⁷¹ 'What the city casts off became another force that challenged it from within' (Ibid., p. 8).

⁷² Ibid., p. 98.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷⁴ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 231.

⁷⁵ Lehan, p. 273.

has been a constant with the city throughout modern history and also reverberates into the urban descriptions in the texts analysed in Chapters 2 and 3.

According to Lefebvre, the identity between space and reason in Western thought, which draws on the combination of Euclidean geometry and the Cartesian notion of homogeneous and isotropic space, accounts for the idea of space as a ‘mental thing’,⁷⁶ abstracted from the sphere of social interaction and everyday activities; it also generates the illusion of transparency, that is the idea that reason can illuminate hidden and unknown places, freeing them from spatial superstitions and fears.⁷⁷ By contrast, Lefebvre gives a more complex definition of space, as the lived dynamic environment that is shaped by the set of economic, social and political factors interacting in a given social system. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre articulates a definition of urban unconscious as the underground and repressed life of the city.⁷⁸ In the framework of his history of space, the urban unconscious is activated by the sedimentary layers of former historical spaces, which continue to fuel symbols and narratives associated with real and concrete places. Moreover, the urban unconscious is associated with the contradictions of power, which always presumes and puts in place some form of resistance. Since space cannot be fully controlled, those aspects that ought to have remained excluded from the dominant spatial organisation, resurface and are perceived as regret or nostalgia.⁷⁹ This, for instance, is the case with green and rural spaces in contemporary societies, which are characterised by the receding of nature.⁸⁰ As Roger Luckhurst claims in relation to present-day London and its ‘spectralized modernity’, the more urban redesign tries to get rid of certain aspects, the more likely it is that these return to haunt the moderns in the form of the repressed.⁸¹

As stated above, the uncanny has been associated with big-city life throughout urban history, and feelings of anxiety and estrangement have accompanied the rise of the

⁷⁶ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷⁹ ‘Within this [abstract] space, and on the subject of this space, everything is openly declared: everything is said or written. Save for the fact that there is very little to be said – and even less to be “lived”, for lived experience is crushed, vanquished by what is “conceived of”. History is experienced as nostalgia, and nature as regret – as a horizon fast disappearing behind us. This may explain why affectivity, which, along with the sensory/sensual realm, cannot accede to abstract space and so informs no symbolism, is referred to by a term that denotes both a subject and that subject’s denial by the absurd rationality of space: that term is “the unconscious”’ (*Ibid.*, p. 51).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

⁸¹ Roger Luckhurst, ‘The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the Spectral Turn’, *Textual Practice*, 16.3 (2002), 527-46 (p. 532).

European metropolis at the end of the twentieth century. Another crucial moment articulating the connection between the city and the uncanny, is the rapid development of Western European countries after the end of World War II, with the transformations that economic growth wreaks on urban landscapes. Since, in the decades that follow the war, national economies gradually become more interconnected, increasing spatial homogeneity can be witnessed on an international scale, as theorised by Lefebvre through his notion of abstract space. Modernism, the leading movement in twentieth-century architecture and design, also promotes a principle of replicability, through its style characterised by geometric forms, the rational use of materials, and the emphasis on the functionality of buildings.⁸² It has been argued that Modernism destabilised the ideas of tradition and preservation of memory, which had been at the heart of urbanism from the late Renaissance until the Second World War.⁸³ The project, championed by Modernism, of the city as *tabula rasa*, that is, a city freed from the burden of the past and open instead to modern values of efficiency and mobility, clearly seeks to do away with the idea of urban space as a memory map, where monuments and buildings acts as symbolic references to meaningful historic events to reinforce the sense of identity and community cohesion.⁸⁴ As Lehan has suggested, the modern city is founded on ‘the presence of an absence’, namely the absence of the traditional city, which is negated but continues to inhabit the urban unconscious.⁸⁵

As in the previous chapter, the theories discussed in Chapter 3 are also framed within the specific historical context of post-war Italy. This means that, whilst I recognise, through the theories that have been discussed above, that the category of the uncanny belongs to urban experience *tout court*, I also aim to contextualise it historically, in terms of the feeling of existential uneasiness that characterises the Italian post-war period. In this regard, I refer in particular to Giuliana Minghelli’s ‘Icons of Remorse’, which develops the theme of the collective removal of Italy’s past, arguing that what is repressed is not only the history of Fascism and war, but also of the early 1950s, which are characterised by socio-political conflict and violence.⁸⁶ Minghelli sees the 1950s as a

⁸² Vidler, p. 151.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 179.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 178-79.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 182-83.

⁸⁶ Giuliana Minghelli, ‘Icons of Remorse: Photography, Anthropology and the Erasure of History in 1950s Italy’, *Modern Italy*, 21.4 (2016), 383-407 (p. 388).

'space of cultural transition',⁸⁷ which unfolds at the intersection between tradition and modernity. Interestingly, Minghelli's essay bridges the discussion in Chapters 3 and 4, for it engages with both the return of a 'bad' past, by examining post-war Italy's 'amnesiac culture of benessere',⁸⁸ and with the exploration of the national territory on the eve of the boom, in the context of De Martino's fieldwork expeditions to the South. In Minghelli's view, the concept of remorse that is central to De Martino's ethnographic work on the Italian South,⁸⁹ provides a key to the understanding of Italy's failure to build a robust sense of national identity, based on a critical reflection upon the past. This theme returns in Chapter 4, through the image of the South as repressed modernity that emerges from the texts under scrutiny: a counterpart to the powerful centres of the industrial North, which provide the focus of the previous two chapters.

1.4.3 Post-War Italian Travel Writing

A further point of connection between Chapters 3 and 4, lies in the fact that they both concentrate on literary genres, crime fiction and travel writing, which, in Italy, have been long deemed marginal. Detective stories and travel accounts have indeed struggled to attain equal dignity within a literary canon that has championed the idea of a hierarchy between the genres and which has assigned superiority to lyric poetry over the novel. As a result, the development of a type of narrative fiction that is able to mirror the complexity of reality, by engaging with socio-political issues and linguistic experimentation, was delayed, in Italy; as was the emergence of a literary theory of the novel, addressing socio-cultural issues, as well as questions of gender and sexuality.⁹⁰ Chapter 4 approaches these issues through the examples of Ortese and Arbasino, though it is important to note that this dissertation only touches upon gender and queer identity, in relation to questions of spatial experience and representation, and therefore does not delve into the vast field of academic research on gender and queer theory. Some of the theorists whose work I have

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 383.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 386.

⁸⁹ See Ernesto De Martino, *La terra del rimorso* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1961).

⁹⁰ Remo Ceserani and Pierluigi Pellini, 'The Belated Development of a Theory of the Novel in Italian Literary Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel*, ed. by P. Bondanella and A. Ciccarelli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-19 (p. 16).

consulted and who have in various ways inspired the analysis in Chapter 4, include Lee Edelman, Doreen Massey and Gillian Rose.⁹¹ The latter two, especially, have addressed in their work the interconnections between notions of space and place (and the very realm of geographical knowledge), on the one hand, and the construction of gender, gender relations and sexuality, on the other. The analysis in Chapter 4 suggests that our conceptions and experience of space are not only influenced by economic factors and class divisions, but also by other power relations and axes of distinctions that operate within our societies, such as, for instance, the gender-based one.

Chapter 4 explores the (re-)discovery of the Italian national territory in the aftermath of World War II, through the analysis of three samples of post-war travel literature by Italian writers Guido Piovene, Anna Maria Ortese and Alberto Arbasino. The discussion in Chapter 4 embraces a wider portion of the Italian territory, including areas that find no room in the previous two chapters, devoted to the urban-industrial society of the North. The theme of anxiety that is a central thread in the dissertation, emerges, in Chapter 4, as one of the main factors that prompt post-war Italian writers and intellectuals to travel and explore their country. More specifically, the analysis moves from the feeling of disorientation that has been identified in the previous two chapters in relation to post-war urbanisation, to argue that this plays an active role in inducing Italian writers to take the roads of Italy in the 1950s and 1960s, with the aim of getting to know better their country and themselves. As Torriglia has pointed out, the journey is increasingly conceptualised in post-war Italian literature and cinema as a figure of discovery and self-discovery for intellectuals and ordinary Italians alike, after the fall of Fascism and the end of the war.⁹² This is due to the fact that most Italians, and intellectuals among them, had in various ways supported the Fascist regime and were now eager to put the past behind them and move forward.

Toriglia's *Broken Time, Fragmented Space*, which provides a conceptual map of Italian post-war culture through the analysis of recurring themes and images, such as the journey, is a key text for the discussion of Italian travel writing in Chapter 4. Torriglia's study on post-war Italy, moreover, corroborates one of the main hypotheses underpinning this research, namely the idea of an Italian uncanny as survived continuity with the past,

⁹¹ I refer in particular to Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994); and Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

⁹² Torriglia, p. 118.

as she claims the fracture between Italian pre- and post-war culture to be more of an 'ideological construct'.⁹³ With regard to post-war Italy's intellectual and literary tradition, it can indeed be seen a 'reconversion of signs',⁹⁴ that is, a reuse and appropriation of Fascist symbols, rather than the emergence of an intellectual experience that breaks completely with the past.⁹⁵ The fact that post-war cultural trends, chiefly Neorealism, have presented themselves as radically new experiences drawing a line of demarcation between Fascist and Republican Italy, may therefore betray a crisis of identity and self-representation among post-war Italian intellectuals, and the need for them to rebuild their reputation as public figures.⁹⁶ Indeed, most intellectuals were influenced by and, in many cases, actively participated in the cultural activities of the Fascist regime, especially in its earlier stages, when Fascism appeared to many as a revolutionary movement that would bring modernisation to Italian society. On a broader level, the individual crisis of representation intertwines with the need to build a collective sense of identity and a redeemed image for the country after the war. The journey, both physical and metaphorical, therefore 'becomes one of the heuristic procedures through which a class of intellectuals tries to learn more about Italy and about itself': an agent of both national and personal discovery.⁹⁷

Travel takes multiple forms and meanings in the 1950s and 1960s, and provides one of the key themes to understand these decades.⁹⁸ If, on the one hand, one has the journey of writers and intellectuals as critical (self-)exploration that has been discussed above, on the other, the post-war period witnesses mass internal migrations among poorer sectors of the Italian population. As Ginsborg reports, between 1955 and 1971, some 9,140,000 Italians migrate to different areas of the country,⁹⁹ mainly from the impoverished rural South into the booming industrial cities of the North and the capital Rome. Moreover, as the growing middle class acquires leisure time, in the same years there emerges a culture of *villeggiatura*. Thanks to the expansion of the road network and railway system, and to increased economic well-being, extended to a larger section of the

⁹³ Ibid., p. xii.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

⁹⁵ 'Elements of Fascist rhetoric were, ironically, employed to construct the heroic representation of *Resistenza*, to advocate a generic populism, and to craft a supposedly "new" cultural self-representation' (Ibid., p. 12).

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. xii-xiii.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 119-20.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 120.

⁹⁹ Ginsborg, p. 219.

population, in the post-war period travelling becomes easier and faster for ordinary Italians. In order to better capture the multifaceted nature of travel in those years, in Chapter 4, I have selected three examples of post-war Italian travel writing that provide different perspectives on post-war Italy's transformations. The examined texts provide insights into patterns of belonging and exclusion within post-war Italy's geography of industrialisation, as well as into the positioning of the author in travel writing, not only in relation to spatial issues, but also in terms of questions of gender and sexuality. Specifically, I focus on Piovene's *Viaggio in Italia* (1956), an extensive documentary account of 1950s Italy's socio-spatial transformations, which Piovene observes methodically as he travels from North to South, one region after the other, in the course of three years. I also look at Ortese's *La lente scura*, which was published in 1991 but contains travel pieces that were written by Ortese between the end of the 1940s and the early 1960s. We shall see in Chapter 4 that *La lente scura* provides a less systematic and authoritative view on the observed reality than *Viaggio in Italia*. Finally, I analyse Arbasino's *Fratelli d'Italia* (1963), the account of four intellectual friends with sophisticated tastes and a cosmopolitan lifestyle, who embark on yet a different kind of journey. In its portrait of the Italian post-war cultural scene, *Fratelli d'Italia* is also somewhat encyclopaedic, though in a way that differs considerably from the all-encompassing viewpoint adopted by Piovene in *Viaggio in Italia*.

Chapter 4 also explores how, in the post-war years, the theme of the journey intertwines with the issues of Italy's constitutional fragmentation and tenuous sense of national identity. Italian collective identity has been tested at crucial moments of the country's history, not least during the two-year period of civil war that leads to the end of World War II. The nation-building process does not appear fully accomplished in the post-war years and is in fact put again into question at later stages of Italian history, such as, for instance, with the fall of the so-called First Republic, following the Tangentopoli scandal and constitutional crisis of the 1990s.¹⁰⁰ At the root of the problem, there are certainly strong regional differences, but also the already discussed inability of Italian society to promote a critical reflection on its past. As Minghelli has pointed out, Italy's unresolved sense of national identity may indeed be related to 'the persistently absent cultural elaboration of the past leading to a confused sense of any collective project'.¹⁰¹ In

¹⁰⁰ Burns, *Fragments of Impegno*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁰¹ Minghelli, p. 400.

examining this problematic notion of Italianness, Chapter 4 draws a parallel between the post-unification and post-war periods through the tradition of Italian domestic travel writing. Travel accounts of these two periods share indeed some common traits: particularly, the sense of discovery and appropriation of the national territory and, to some extent, an educational intent. In the post-war years, the latter is especially the concern of mass media, which show a pedagogic role in educating Italians through the many travel documentaries produced for the radio and newly born television, a tendency of which *Viaggio in Italia*, written for Radio RAI, is clearly an example.

Chapter 4 engages with scholarship on travel literature, focusing in particular on studies that are concerned with the tradition of Italian domestic travel accounts and the history of the Grand Tour. The latter is crucial for understanding the evolution of the genre of travel writing in Italy, for Grand Tour travellers have largely shaped the subsequent tradition of Italian travelogues and the very image (and geography) of Italy in the European imagination. As a consequence, Italian travel writers have had to come to terms with the tradition of the Grand Tour. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, Arbasino's *Fratelli d'Italia*, which openly refers to and takes inspiration from the Grand Tour, is particularly emblematic in this regard and functions as a particular kind of postmodern appropriation of tradition. In terms of Italian domestic travel writing, Chapter 4 refers in particular to the seminal research conducted by Luca Clerici, which has provided the first comprehensive study of travel accounts written by Italian authors travelling in Italy from the early eighteenth century to the late twentieth century.¹⁰² While it is true that the dominant way of looking at Italy in the tradition of travel writing remains foreign and contemplative, one can challenge the assumption that, in Italy, travel literature has been the exclusive domain of non-Italian authors. The chapter examines how the texts relate, on the one hand, to stereotypes that have shaped the discourse on Italy in the tradition of travel writing and, on the other, to the anxiety relating to Italy's regionalisation and troubled sense of collective identity. The theme of post-war existential uncertainty provides the starting point for analysing the new idea of travel that emerges in those years: travel as critical examination of the inconsistencies of the modernisation process in Italy, and as problematisation of stereotyped images of the Italian peninsula, pertaining to the contemplative tradition of the Grand Tour.

¹⁰² See in particular Luca Clerici, *Il viaggiatore meravigliato* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1999) and his *Viaggiatori italiani in Italia, 1700-1998: per una bibliografia* (Milan: Bonnard, 1999).

2. The Authoritarian City in the Work of Luciano Bianciardi and Paolo Volponi

2.1 Introduction

As was anticipated, this chapter focuses on the idea of authoritarian city, developed by Luciano Bianciardi and Paolo Volponi in the novels *La vita agra* and *Memoriale*. On the one hand, Bianciardi and Volponi highlight the changes wrought by post-war economic development on the two northern cities, through the reorganisation of urban spaces and the construction of new buildings, which embody the values of efficiency and economic progress at the heart of post-war Italy's boom. On the other, they detect in the built environment and its authoritarian monumentality a sinister continuity with Italy's recent totalitarian past. As already noted, I will integrate my analysis of *Memoriale* with some reflections from *Le mosche del capitale*, a later novel by Volponi that provides a perfect complement to *Memoriale* for the reasons that will become clear in the course of our analysis. Published in 1989, *Le mosche del capitale* was actually written during the decade of the 1970s: once again, it can be seen that the discourse on urban change and its impact on individuals persists beyond the immediate boom period, intersecting with the postmodern debate in Italian literature.

Volponi's work has frequently been read by his critics in relation to the portrayal of industry and the factory environment, against the backdrop of the tradition of the Italian *romanzo industriale* that develops in the 1950s and 1960s, in which Volponi is a central figure and Bianciardi also finds a clear position, with the analysis of the Italian cultural industry in books such as *Il lavoro culturale* (1957) and *La vita agra*. Carlo Varotti has pointed out the belated emergence of industrial literature in Italy compared to other countries, due to the delayed nature of the Italian industrialisation process, as well as the fact that the season of the *romanzo industriale*, in Italy, takes hold in a relatively short

period of time.¹ This can be roughly circumscribed within the publication, in 1957, of Ottieri's *Tempi stretti* and Bianciardi's *Il lavoro culturale*, and that of Parise's *Il padrone* in 1965.² Varotti argues that, in the 1980s, further socio-economic changes also determine a redefinition of the working class and, to some extent, a process of integration of the latter with the industrial world.³ The *romanzo industriale* needs to be seen not only as a novel that addresses factory life as its main topic, but that also undertakes a revision of language and style, in order to explore more effectively the social changes and feelings of anxiety underlying post-war economic growth.⁴ In this regard, Mori has noticed how, very often, 'il romanzo industriale fotografa quella parte d'Italia scontenta e delusa dal benessere decantato dalle cifre e amplificato dalla televisione e dai mezzi di informazione'.⁵

Literary works, including novels, poems, and short stories which explore the industrial system, position themselves into a wider debate among Italian intellectuals, which reaches a mature conceptualisation in the issue number 4 of *Il Menabò*, published in 1961 and entirely dedicated to the relationship between literature and industry.⁶ The issue hosts an introductory article by *Il Menabò*'s founder and editorial director Vittorini, followed by examples of industrial literature written by prominent Italian writers and intellectuals, including Vittorio Sereni, Giovanni Giudici, Ottiero Ottieri, and Luigi Davì, and critical essays by Gianni Scalia, Agostino Pirrella and Marco Forti, all addressing the question of how literature can most effectively document the new reality of industrialisation, by updating its modes of expression and representation. The contributors felt that this was a particularly relevant issue in Italy, whose literary production still relied heavily, at the time, on a classical and to a great extent elitist idea

¹ Carlo Varotti, 'Fabbrica', in *Luoghi della letteratura italiana*, ed. by G. M. Anselmi and G. Ruozi (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), pp. 180-190 (p. 180).

² Rocco Capozzi, 'Dalla "Letteratura e industria" all'industria del postmoderno', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 9 (1991), 144-157 (p. 144).

³ Varotti, p. 180.

⁴ Piergiorgio Mori, *Scrittori nel boom: il romanzo industriale negli anni del miracolo italiano* (Rome: Edilet-Edilazio, 2011), p. 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁶ 'Vittorini dà vita, fra il 1959 e il 1967, alla rivista di letteratura e critica "Il Menabò", fin dal titolo dimostrativa dell'intento di offrire una sede di discorso, per successive approssimazioni sperimentali, intorno alla novità che parve essere fondamentale come resa dei conti del concetto stesso di letterato e di intellettuale: la presenza sempre più massiccia della realtà dell'industria [...]. Il numero fondamentale del "Menabò" (n. 4, 1962) fu quello dedicato appunto a letteratura e industria, con la discussione, che vi si intrecciò vivacissima, fra sociologi, poeti, narratori, critici di diversissime idee e posizioni, sul bene e sul male della realtà industriale come condizione di riferimento per gli intellettuali, del resto ampiamente inseriti nell'industria stessa, da Fortini a Volponi, da Giudici a Ottieri.' Giorgio Barberi Squarotti (ed.), *Storia della civiltà letteraria italiana*, 6 vols (Turin: UTET, 1996), vol. 5, II, p. 1666.

of culture. The fact that the 1961 issue of *Il Menabò* sparks reaction and further debate can be seen as symptomatic of the centrality that the themes addressed by Vittorini and the other contributors had assumed in Italian culture of those years.⁷

Volponi is certainly an emblematic figure within the tradition of the *romanzo industriale*, for his career is twofold: industrial manager at Olivetti and Fiat, and writer who often portrays industry in his work. One of the peculiarities of the tradition of Italian industrial literature is indeed that many of the writers who write about the industrial world are themselves involved at different levels within Italian industry. Mori sees this as the ‘emblema di un tentativo unico e straordinario di conciliare le istanze delle realtà culturali e intellettuali formatesi all’indomani del fascismo e della guerra, e le esigenze di crescita economica e industriale del Paese’.⁸ The cooperation between writers and industry was made possible mainly thanks to a group of innovative and forward-looking industrialists, such as Vittorio Valletta, Oscar Sinigaglia, Enrico Mattei, as well as Adriano Olivetti, ‘grandi innovatori, imprenditori schumpeteriani’, who believed in the ‘riscatto civile e nelle potenzialità di crescita dell’Italia’.⁹ The role played by entrepreneur Olivetti is particularly significant in this regard, for he entrusted writers such as Leonardo Sinisgalli, Franco Fortini, Giovanni Giudici, Ottiero Ottieri and of course Volponi himself, with important roles in his company.¹⁰ Volponi is against the exploitation carried out by the capitalist elite, not against progress and industrial advancement *tout court*.¹¹ His oeuvre owes much to the idea of bridging technical and humanist knowledge. In this sense, Volponi’s disillusion, perhaps most evident in *Le mosche del capitale*, reveals, more broadly, the failure of the reform project of Italian industry, reflected in the trajectory of Olivetti. After the entrepreneur’s death, his family firm experienced financial problems due to poor strategic choices and the new, unfavourable situation of Italian economy.¹²

⁷ Mori., p. 33.

⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

⁹ Franco Amatori and Andrea Colli, *Impresa e industria in Italia dall’Unità a oggi* (Venice: Marsilio, 1999), p. 239.

¹⁰ Barberi Squarotti describes the Olivetti Company as ‘quel centro di fervide discussioni sul mondo della fabbrica, sulla condizione operaia, sull’organizzazione della vita e del tempo libero [...] con il movimento di Comunità fondato da Adriano Olivetti con programma di fare della fabbrica un luogo di umano incontro oltre che di lavoro’ (*Storia della civiltà letteraria italiana*, p. 1666).

¹¹ Capozzi argues that ‘Volponi ha costantemente creduto nelle possibilità di umanizzare l’industria, fiducioso che il nemico dell’uomo non sia la macchina o il computer ma la sete di profitto delle “mosche del capitale” che sfruttano l’apparato industriale e tecnologico’ (p. 146).

¹² Amatori and Colli, pp. 269-70.

Further examples of authors who have participated in this particular trend by denouncing the idiosyncrasies of industrialisation, the emerging social divisions in post-war Italian society, and the isolating effect of factory work, are Ottiero Ottieri, especially with his novels *Tempi stretti* (1957) and *Donnarumma all'assalto* (1959), Giovanni Testori, whose work has been briefly discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation, Giovanni Arpino (*Gli anni del giudizio*, 1958; *Una nuvola d'ira*, 1962), Lucio Mastronardi, with his trilogy of books (*Il calzolaio di Vigevano*, 1959; *Il maestro di Vigevano*, 1962; *Il meridionale di Vigevano*, 1964), which bear witness to the transformations in the productive environment of the Vigevano area, from workshops to small industries,¹³ Vasco Pratolini (*Costanza della ragione*, 1962), Alberto Bevilacqua (*La Califfa*, 1964), and Goffredo Parise (*Il padrone*, 1965).¹⁴ Calvino was another protagonist of this season, both with books that address post-war modernisation and industrial development, as discussed in the Introduction, and by participating directly in the debate on the renewal of Italian literature through new languages and ways of representation, with articles published in journals and magazines, for instance in the subsequent issue of *Il Menabò*, which comes out in 1962.¹⁵ Many works and most notably, perhaps, those of Ottieri and Volponi, have focused on the theme of alienation and mental illness that derive from the repetitiveness, apparent lack of meaning, and distancing from nature that characterise the industrial system. Industry as a 'second nature' is also at the core of Antonioni's *Il deserto rosso* (1964) and is a central thread in the issue number 4 of *Il Menabò*.¹⁶ We will see below how the character of Albino Saluggia in *Memoriale* perfectly embodies this *malaise*. Bianciardi describes similar feelings of frustration and unease in his works of the Milanese years, by focusing on Italian cultural industry and thus showing how in 1960s consumerist society, intellectual work has become

¹³ Amatori and Colli observe that 'se infatti negli anni fra le due guerre il calzaturiero italiano è un settore dominato dall'artigianato urbano e caratterizzato da un impiego massiccio della subfornitura e del lavoro a domicilio, a partire dal secondo dopoguerra le botteghe iniziano a essere via via sostituite da laboratori e piccole fabbriche che fanno fronte al notevole incremento della produzione' (p. 256).

¹⁴ Many of the texts that belong to the genre of the *romanzo industriale*, have been collected in Giorgio Bigatti and Giuseppe Lupo (eds), *Fabbrica di carta: i libri che raccontano l'Italia industriale* (Rome: Laterza, 2013). Another crucial study on literature and industry in Italy is Giorgio Barberi Squarotti and Carlo Ossola (eds), *Letteratura e industria: atti del XV Congresso A.I.S.L.L.I., Torino, 15-19 maggio 1994*, 2 vols (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1997).

¹⁵ Italo Calvino, 'La tematica industriale', *Il Menabò*, 5 (1962), 18-21. In the same issue, see also Calvino's 'La sfida al labirinto', 85-99. In the latter, Calvino tackles the theme of the 'ricerca costante di vie d'uscita dall'impasse, con una letteratura che sonde nuove opportunità e nuove aree stilistiche' (p. 62).

¹⁶ On this topic, see also Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, 'La letteratura e la "nuova natura" creata dell'industria', in *Letteratura e industria*, ed. by G. Barberi Squarotti e C. Ossola, vol. 1, pp. 25-42.

commodified. Both Bianciardi and Volponi have therefore emphasised the malfunctions of the industrial system and their effects in terms of the increasing isolation and alienation of the individual in post-war Italian society.

While the work of Bianciardi and Volponi has certainly ideological implications, it does not align itself with a dominant political agenda, specifically that of the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano; PCI). If indeed, as Burns argues, such an unproblematic conception of *impegno* had ever been embraced by left-leaning Italian intellectuals in the post-war years, which is debatable, it nonetheless reveals cracks at the time in which Bianciardi and Volponi are writing:¹⁷ the new trend towards experimental writing, emerging in 1960s Italian literature, puts it radically into question, by privileging matters of form and style over content.¹⁸ The example of Bianciardi is particularly emblematic of the growing dissent towards the PCI's hegemonic views and cultural policy among Italian writers and intellectuals, particularly after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the popularity enjoyed by *La vita agra*, by far his most successful book, subsequently Bianciardi devotes himself to the writing of historical texts and contributions to sports magazines, hence rejecting the opportunity of becoming a central figure in the emerging *cultura della contestazione*.¹⁹ This stance goes hand in hand with Bianciardi's gradual disillusionment with politics: a path that is clearly reflected by the events narrated in *La vita agra*. The excerpt cited below, from an article that Bianciardi writes for *Il Contemporaneo*, sums up the trajectory described in the novel, in which the protagonist ends up being assimilated into the mechanisms of modern city life and into the automation of intellectual work, necessary to maintain the new habits of overconsumption. The article clearly locates the 'enemy' in the modern office buildings of Milan's financial district, a point that will be discussed further in the course of the chapter.

Persino quel che mi pareva chiaro, la posizione del nemico nei palazzoni di dieci piani, fra via Turati e via della Moscova a Milano non mi è parso più tanto chiaro. Perché qui le acque si mischiano e si confondono.

¹⁷ Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative, 1980-2000* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2001), p. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁹ See Massimo Coppola and Alberto Piccinini, 'Luciano Bianciardi, l'io opaco', in *L'antimeridiano: opere complete*, ed. by M. Coppola (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), pp. i- xxxiv; and Corrias, *Vita agra di un anarchico*.

L'intellettuale diventa un pezzo dell'apparato burocratico commerciale, diventa un ragioniere.²⁰

One of the central ideas underpinning the choice of the dissertation time frame lies in the continuity between the pre- and post-war governments, and therefore in a Fascist legacy that extends well beyond the fall of the regime in 1943. While, as has been argued in the previous chapter, the boom certainly represents a rupture in modern Italian history, for it delineates a new model of economic development and brings about dramatic changes in Italians' lifestyles and beliefs, over the course of a few years, it also becomes clear that in the post-war Republic renewal and continuity go hand in hand. In other words, institutions and socio-political assets that have survived from the pre-war period overlap with the aspects of innovation.²¹ Crainz has shown, for instance, that the 1950s witness the consolidation of attitudes and institutions that are rooted in 1920s and 1930s Italy.²² More specifically, there is evidence of the persistence of practices of repression and intimidation, especially towards members of the Communist party and left-wing activists, which find a new justification in the climate of the Cold War and in the context of the anti-Communist alliance between the countries of the Western block.²³

The thesis of the survival of a Fascist mentality in the Republic, to use Dondi's definition, is based on the evidence that a real process of de-fascistisation, that is, a political purge of Fascist men²⁴ and institutions, was never accomplished. Indeed, on the one hand, the consensus on how the cleansing process was to be carried out proved difficult to achieve due to the presence, in the Italian territory in the aftermath of the war, of a mosaic of military and political forces with their differing views and aims.²⁵ On the other, the initial willingness of the political parties and particularly the Christian

²⁰ Luciano Bianciardi, 'Lettera da Milano', *Il Contemporaneo*, 5 February 1955 (in Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, p. 110).

²¹ Mirco Dondi points out that 'after 1960, neo-fascists, whether members of the MSI or its friends, found positions in the heart of the state, in the secret services, in the military hierarchy, in a fashion that would condition Italian life for decades to come, blocking even the most timid move to the Left'. Mirco Dondi, 'The Fascist Mentality after Fascism', in *Italian Fascism: History, Memory and Representation*, ed. by R. J. B. Bosworth and P. Dogliani (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999), pp. 141-60 (p. 155).

²² Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, p. vii.

²³ 'La "democrazia congelata" degli anni della guerra fredda si realizza tramite apparati e uomini formati negli anni venti e trenta; si traduce in meccanismi continui di controllo e di "esclusione"; vede i diritti formalmente riconosciuti al cittadino messi costantemente in mora da pratiche di discriminazione' (Ibid., p. viii).

²⁴ It is interesting to note that, presumably, it is indeed exclusively men in these positions of influence under the Fascist regime.

²⁵ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, 'Liberation: Italian Cinema and the Fascist Past, 1945-50', in *Italian Fascism*, ed. by Bosworth and Dogliani, pp. 83-101 (pp. 89-90).

Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana; DC), the Italian majority party throughout the 1950s, to carry out the purge, grew more cautious as it became clear that a substantial portion of Italian society, including key officials and members of the bureaucratic system, had in various degrees been involved with the regime. As Dondi has pointed out, ‘at least two-thirds of the staff of the Ministry of the Interior would have to be suspended, resulting in a general paralysis of public administration’.²⁶

The question of Fascist legacies in the Italian Republic received more public attention after the fall of the Berlin Wall and end of the Cold War, followed, in 1994, by the election victory of the Centre-Right alliance led by Silvio Berlusconi with the support of Alleanza Nazionale, the *de facto* successor of the MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano), the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement, formed in 1946 by former members of the Italian Social Republic.²⁷ The failure of the cleansing process of men that had in various ways collaborated with the Fascist regime, was accompanied, in the post-war years, by the substantial inability of the leading sectors of Italian society to prompt a critical reflection on the past, in order to come to terms with Fascism and Italians’ collective responsibility in it. On the contrary, the general tendency, which suited the needs of reconstruction and recovery of Italy’s wretched economy, was to try and forget: a removal process that Ben-Ghiat has described as ‘collective amnesia’.²⁸ As Dunnage has observed, in post-war Italian society, ‘there was no far-reaching or systematic process of examination of consciences or re-education’ to counterbalance the longstanding effects of the Regime’s policies and propaganda on the mentality of Italians.²⁹

The texts examined in this chapter reflect a politico-sociological notion of the city which is rooted in this specific historical context. The historical approach draws on the thesis of a continuity with the past that has been presented above, and is complemented by theories on the relation between power and space, developed in particular by Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre. I will, indeed, make use of a range of theories that aim to demonstrate how spatiality is integral to the exercise of power. Sections 2.2 and 2.3 focus on Bianciardi’s and Volponi’s criticism of industrial capitalism and the model of urban

²⁶ Dondi, p. 143.

²⁷ Claudio Pavone, ‘The General Problem of the Continuity of the State and the Legacy of Fascism’, in *After the War: Violence, Justice, Continuity and Renewal in Italian Society*, ed. by J. Dunnage (Market Harborough: Troubador, 1999), pp. 5-20 (p. 5).

²⁸ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, ‘Fascism, Writing, and Memory: The Realist Aesthetic in Italy, 1930-1950’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 67.3 (1995), 627-665 (p. 663).

²⁹ Jonathan Dunnage, ‘Conclusion: Facing the Past and Building for the Future in Postwar Italy’, in *After the War*, ed. by Dunnage, pp. 89-100 (p. 90).

modernity associated with it, by examining, respectively, the literary representations of urban spaces and industrial architecture. In these two sections of the chapter, I especially refer to Lefebvre's analysis of the abstract space of neo-capitalist societies, and his notions of space colonisation and logic of visualisation, by which, for instance, skyscrapers become a symbol of aggressive (male) power, tied to sexual imagery: an idea that, as we shall see, bears strong resonances in all of the texts under scrutiny. Section 2.4 focuses on textual descriptions of new forms of social control, aiming at increasing efficiency and productivity in post-war Italian society, and draws on Foucault's ideas of apparatus and bio-politics to support literary analysis. Hence, in the last section of the chapter, the novels' war imagery is discussed in relation to Foucault's analysis of the strategies that state power implements to control the social body, as well as in the context of Fascist legacies in the post-war Italian Republic, which has been outlined above. In so doing, the chapter delineates a profile of the authoritarian city emerging from the texts under scrutiny, in which buildings are a reminder of the authority of state power and the organisation of spaces within the city affects the behaviour of urban dwellers, enhancing their productivity and instilling acquiescence. I posit that unprocessed events and trauma play a central role in the notion of the disciplinary city conveyed by the texts. With this in mind, I propose a definition of historical uncanny that applies to the Italian post-war years, against the backdrop of the survival of a Fascist mentality in the Republic. This will be the central theme in the following chapter, 'The Uncanny City', which explores the representations of Milan and Turin in the crime novels of Giorgio Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini, through psychoanalytical approaches to the study of urban space.

Bianciardi and Volponi narrate the changing morphology of Milan and Turin, in response to the new values of industrial efficiency, movement and mobility that inform post-war Italy's economic growth. Their novels convey an anti-urban stance which draws on the literary imagery of the city as a site of corruption and alienation, also supported by early twentieth-century sociologists. *La vita agra*, in particular, certainly draws some inspiration from the European literary tradition of Romantic origins that expresses a recoil from the modern city, by praising the mystic and instinctive aspects of nature, which have been sacrificed to the rationalist and materialist parameters of metropolitan life.³⁰ In the

³⁰ 'The Enlightenment depicted the city as a powerful grid superimposed upon the natural, and the romantics questioned what that grid repressed: the naturalists, who shared the romantics' doubt, depicted the city as an energy system and an alienating mechanism that inculcated a degenerative process by creating a diseased center outside of nature' (Lehan, p. 70).

concluding section of the novel, Bianciardi describes his ideal model of society – which arguably represents a fusion of this anti-urban tradition with the hippie counterculture of the 1960s –, based on the idea of a return to nature through self-organised forms of collective communities, where private property is abolished. Albeit reworked and adapted to the peculiar context of 1960s Milan, Bianciardi deploys some of the traditional motifs that have been applied to the description of the metropolis in the literary imagination and in the sociological analysis of the effects of rapid urbanisation: in particular, individualism and the feelings of detachment and alienation that result from the overstimulation of metropolitan life and its distancing from nature. Worries about the changing relationship with the natural environment that emerge from the texts under scrutiny also bear witness to the contradictions of post-war development, which privileges economic growth over the preservation of the historic patrimony and the natural environment, and takes place in a country, Italy, deeply concerned with its past and tradition and generally reluctant to implement innovation. A country, to put it in Volponi's words, 'altalenante e sfuggente, scrimine tra sviluppo e ritardo'.³¹ Ginsborg, for instance, has observed that the number of new houses increases enormously and often haphazardly between 1957 and 1964, since planners and constructors generally fail to prioritise the conservation of green areas.³² In those years, building speculation also plays a central role in the unregulated sprawl of urban centres, at the expense of the countryside.³³ This, indeed, is a recurrent theme, addressed in different ways by Italian writers and intellectuals, such as, notably, Calvino, in the novel *La speculazione edilizia*.

The 'intellectual resentment'³⁴ generated by the city in Western culture finds one of its first and most famous advocates in Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This critical view of the modern city, which has arisen at an earlier stage elsewhere in Europe, and especially in England and France, due to the prior development in these countries of industrial capitalism and commercialism and therefore of the modern metropolis, is embodied most notably by the work of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and James Joyce.³⁵ Whilst in this tradition there is still room for the independent consciousness of the self who experiences the city, even though the latter is becoming increasingly difficult for the subject to comprehend

³¹ Paolo Volponi, *Le mosche del capitale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991), p. 186.

³² Ginsborg, p. 246.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Lehan, p. xv.

³⁵ 'Modern realism takes much of its meaning from the rise of the new city, and this is true in France as it is in England.' (Ibid., p. 53).

(as is the case of *La vita agra*), the type of subjectivity depicted by Volponi is either threatened and on the verge of being scattered into pieces (*Memoriale*), therefore offering a seemingly unreliable take on reality; or is opaque and elusive, when the narration shifts toward allegoric modes of representation that signal the emergence of a postmodern sensibility and the later stage of capitalism in which the city has become more autoreferential (*Le mosche del capitale*). As the hub of money and information exchanges, the late capitalist city mirrors the immateriality and volatility of capital, and is therefore more difficult to represent.

A further reason for the generally hostile view of the city that emerges from the novels under scrutiny, may once again be linked to the writers' rejection of the Fascist legacies that they detect in post-war Italian society, from the privileged observatory of the powerful industrial centres of the North. Indeed, especially in its early stages, Fascism presented itself as a revolutionary movement championing the modernisation of Italian society, to be achieved by emphasising the role of the main Italian cities as irradiation centres of innovations, consumerist practises and of a new imperialist notion of Italianness.³⁶ It should be noted, however, that while the regime praised the advancements brought about by industrialisation and urbanisation, its propaganda unfolded in contradictory ways, especially in different phases of its history. Another tendency in Fascist rhetoric was indeed represented by the *Strapaese* movement, which embraced the traditional values and virtues of rural Italy, tied to 'the regime myths such as pronatalism and fertility, nationalism and eugenics'.³⁷ The journal *Il Selvaggio* was the main organ of the movement, embodying the subversive connotation of early Fascism and lambasting, instead, the more conservative stance that the regime had progressively adopted.³⁸ In much Fascist literature, the *Strapaese* ideas resulted in a somewhat idyllic and stereotyped representation of the Italian rural landscape and country life as the most authentic essence of Italianness.³⁹

³⁶ Torriglia, p. 8.

³⁷ David Albert Best, *Ruralism in Central Italian Writers, 1927-1997: From Strapaese Landscapes to the Gendering of Nature: Fabio Tombari, Paolo Volponi, Carlo Cassola, Romana Petri* (Ancona: Ancona University Press, 2010), p. 19. Best also observes that 'Mussolini's propaganda lauded the pastoral myth, providing a context for phenomena such as *Strapaese* [...]. Agriculture lay at the foundation not only of economics, but at the root of regime doctrine; ruralism would, at least in image, be an aspired and idealised way of life for Fascist citizens' (p. 20).

³⁸ 'Strapaese', in *Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana*, ed. by Vittore Branca, 3 vols (Turin: UTET, 1974), vol. 3, pp. 425-29.

³⁹ See for instance Best's analysis of the work of central Italian writer Fabio Tombari in the context of Fascist rhetoric and, specifically, its idealisation of ruralism.

The countryside, in *Memoriale*, ultimately does not provide the protagonist of the novel with the lasting happiness and sense of belonging that he is unable to find in the factory environment. Another book from Volponi, *La macchina mondiale* (1965), also describes the rural society of Central Italy in terms of the feeling of alienation that plagues the main character Anteo Crocioni, who, after his wife leaves him, even contemplates suicide. In *La macchina mondiale*, Volponi also reflects on the constraints imposed by the inequitable landowning structure that dominated Central Italy in those years, known as *mezzadria*.⁴⁰ At this stage in his career, Volponi hopes that these inequalities may be overcome through a type of industrial development that will empower rather than oppress Italian workers. While Bianciardi perhaps romanticises slightly the lost world of the Maremma coal miners, his sociological inquiry on their living and working conditions cannot be associated to the views expressed by the *Strapaesani* in journals such as *Il Selvaggio* and *L'Italiano*, founded by Leo Longanesi. The criticism of repressive and authoritative aspects of city life, in the novels examined in this chapter, may be read as a denunciation of the totalitarian echoes that the writers still detect in post-war Italian capitalist society: a society that privileges an idea of the city for the rich, in which the poorer and more vulnerable are exploited and marginalised in order to guarantee continued economic growth. In what follows, I provide a reading of *La vita agra*, *Memoriale* and *Le mosche del capitale*, which intertwines the historical viewpoint of the survival of Fascist legacies in the post-war Republic with spatial theories of power. While I acknowledge that the novels find inspiration from some of the motives of modernist writing that have been outlined above, I primarily concentrate on the elements of originality that reflect the peculiar contours of post-war Italian society.

2.2 Power and Spatial Organisation

In 1954, Luciano Bianciardi leaves his hometown Grosseto, in Tuscany, following Giangiacomo Feltrinelli's invitation to join his newly founded publishing house in Milan. Images of Grosseto can be found across Bianciardi's oeuvre. Whilst they are central to

⁴⁰ Best, pp. 69-70.

the journalistic pieces that he writes for the local paper *Gazzetta di Livorno*, while he still lives in Tuscany and works as a school teacher and librarian, they resurface as memories of youth and an alternative to hectic metropolitan life in the works of the Milanese years, *L'integrazione* (1960) and *La vita agra* (1962). Bianciardi's representation of Grosseto sketches a tableau of provincial life, with the human types and routine social interaction that takes place in the streets and squares of the old centre. In *La vita agra*, the memories of small-town life indulge in nostalgia and in the celebration of a romanticised past, especially when remembering the sense of community and human solidarity that seems impossible to find in Milan. Scholars and biographers of Bianciardi have reiterated the importance of Milan in the existential and professional trajectory of the writer, and his antagonism towards the culture of profit embodied by the booming metropolis. In this regard, some studies have also explored the idea that, for Bianciardi, the disillusionment of the Milanese years prompts a seemingly unresolvable fracture.⁴¹ Bianciardi's controversial relationship with Milan and the implications of the boom in terms of emerging consumerist culture and lifestyles, have been at the heart of many studies, which have also highlighted the contradictions of Bianciardi's stance in the context of the *cultura della contestazione* and his opposition to neocapitalism.⁴²

When Bianciardi moves to Milan, the city is undergoing radical transformations, as a result of industrialisation and mass internal migration from the provinces of the North and the poorer regions of the Italian South. Between 1955 and 1971, some 9,140,000 Italians change their domicile and relocate, especially toward the industrial cities of the North, which are dramatically transformed by this sudden influx.⁴³ For those coming from the impoverished regions of rural Italy, the psychological and cultural process of

⁴¹ Maria Clotilde Angelini, for example, analyses how *Il lavoro culturale* and *L'integrazione* reveal Bianciardi's gradual disillusionment with metropolitan life and his looking back with nostalgia to the life and ideals that he had repudiated by leaving Grosseto. Maria Clotilde Angelini, *Luciano Bianciardi* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1980). The idea of fracture is clearly present also in Mario Terrosi and Alberto Gessani, *L'intellettuale disintegrato: Luciano Bianciardi* (Rome: Iannua, 1985).

⁴² See for instance Velio Abati and others (eds), *Luciano Bianciardi tra neocapitalismo e contestazione* (Rome: Editori riuniti, 1992). It is significant that the editors have chosen the above title for the volume of an important conference that was held in Grosseto, birthplace of Bianciardi, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the author's death, with contributions that address various aspects of Bianciardi's life and writing career. Another example is provided by the research of John Mastrogianakos, who has examined how the style (embedded text) of *La vita agra* represents a narrative of subversion against the consumerist society that the book portrays in its frame narrative. John Mastrogianakos, 'Embedded Narratives of Subversion in Luciano Bianciardi's *La vita agra*', *Forum Italicum*, 37.1 (2003), 121-146.

⁴³ Ginsborg, pp. 219-20.

adjustment to the urban-industrial society of Northern Italy is all but straightforward. As Paul Ginsborg has pointed out,

For the immigrants from the rural South the first impressions of the northern cities were bewildering and often frightening. What struck them most were the wide streets full of traffic, the neon lights and advertisement boards, the way the northerners dressed. [...] these were cities which seemed not just of another country, but of another planet.⁴⁴

As we shall see, the same things strike Bianciardi as new and foreign as he arrives in Milan, and are carefully noted down in *La vita agra*. Meanwhile, Grosseto becomes for Bianciardi a distant reverie and the image of rural Italy that seems about to be swept away by economic progress.

Before going on to analyse the representation of Milan in *La vita agra*, it is worth noting that the novel has strong autobiographical elements. The first-person narrator and protagonist of the story, Luciano, bears the same first name as the author and is clearly Bianciardi's alter-ego. Indeed, Luciano retraces Bianciardi's actual journey from Tuscany to Milan, following the dramatic incident in the Southern Tuscan mine of Ribolla, which exploded in 1954, killing forty-three miners. Bianciardi knew personally some of them and, at the time of the incident, was working on a series of reportages on the miners' working and living conditions, with the collaboration of Carlo Cassola.⁴⁵ The tragedy has a profound effect on him and influences his decision to accept Giangacomo Feltrinelli's invitation to move to Milan and join his publishing house.⁴⁶ In *La vita agra*, Luciano arrives in the Northern capital with the purpose of vindicating the memory of the miners, by blowing up the Montecatini head office, that is the industrial group owning the Ribolla mine, which is headquartered in Milan. His plan, however, will not be accomplished. As the novel proceeds, Luciano's revolutionary ideals gradually fade, while he finds himself more and more settled in a life of routine with precarious employment as translator.

Through the planned spectacular action of blowing up the Montecatini building, Luciano aims to erase a symbol of capitalist exploitation, the skyscraper with its density

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 222.

⁴⁵ The articles have merged into Luciano Bianciardi and Carlo Cassola, *I minatori della Maremma* (Bari: Laterza, 1956).

⁴⁶ Corrias claims that, following the funeral of the forty-three miners, 'Luciano torna a Grosseto sfinito e frastornato dall'enormità della tragedia. È qui che si chiude la sua prima vita, anche se ancora non lo sa' (p. 76).

of offices, from Milan's cityscape. Interestingly, Albino, first-person narrator in *Memoriale* who is employed in the Turinese industry, somewhat echoes Luciano's mission when he declares that he intends to unmask the deception and injustices of the industrial system from within.⁴⁷ Albino's position, however, is more complicated, since, as will be discussed below, his point of view as a narrator is somewhat flawed. Luciano's declaration of war on the new capitalist Milan reverberates into *La vita agra* through the military metaphors that may be found throughout the novel, to suggest that dangers and threats are the inevitable product of metropolitan life and its unpredictability. In the following extract, for instance, the act of sharing a cigarette with the friend and roommate Carlone, is the pretext for Luciano to remember the war and a particular night under the Allied bombing of Foggia, while serving in the Italian army during World War II.

Carlone e io, vecchi compagni contubernali del numero otto terzo piano, amici come soltanto sono amici due uomini quando intorno c'è il pericolo. Come una notte di settembre, vicino a Lecce, quando scendevano rossi i bengala, grappoli dell'ira, uva della collera, insomma the grapes of wrath perché erano bombe inglesi, e fu Dodi a destarmi e mi vide le mani tremare e mi ci mise una sigaretta e la fumammo vicini accosto al muretto del vigneto, mentre di lassù scaricavano tonnellate di tritolo addosso ai tedeschi della Goering in fuga verso nord. Così ora con Carlone la sigaretta scambiata è un pegno di amicizia a difesa contro quest'altra collera grigia della città che si stringe attorno a noi e minaccia quest'isola nostra.⁴⁸

The bombing raid is compared to the fury of the city that grows and menaces 'quest'isola nostra', that is, the area of Brera, a microcosm within Milan that comes to embody a counter-space of resistance to the official city. A cigarette smoked in good company is a way to pluck up courage, in the present as well as during the war. In a similar way, Luciano's sentimental bond with his girlfriend Anna is so strong and exclusive, for the two lovers grab on to it as a defence against the precariousness of modern life. The

⁴⁷ Albino maintains 'desidero smascherare gli inganni, denunciare i colpevoli per amore di giustizia, sacrificandomi come un ribelle'. Paolo Volponi, *Memoriale* (Milan: Garzanti, 1971) p. 25.

⁴⁸ Luciano Bianciardi, *La vita agra* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1977), pp. 31-32.

urgency of love is justified by the existential uncertainty that characterises the current ‘tempi di guerra e di rivoluzioni’.⁴⁹

At the beginning of the novel, Luciano lives in the Brera quarter, which in the book is called Braida (also Braida Guercia and Braida del Guercio): an allusion to the Braidense National Library, located in the Palazzo di Brera. In this chapter, I will use the toponyms Brera and Braida interchangeably. The area of Braida has a bohemian spirit and is mostly frequented by young would-be intellectuals, ‘pittori capelluti, ragazze dai piedi sporchi, fotografi affamati’.⁵⁰ In the novel, Braida has an important role in re-establishing the sense of identity that is under threat in the city, for it provides Luciano with the familiar coordinates that makes him feel safer, if not completely at home. Bianciardi describes Brera as an ‘isle’ and ‘citadel’ to which to retreat from external urban threats, mainly symbolised by the rise of road traffic.

Era una strada tranquilla e tutta *nostra*; il traffico quasi non ci si azzardava, ma anche in via della Braida, che pure è centrale e frequentata, le auto sembravano riconoscere che questa era *zona nostra* e rallentavano più del dovuto, e i piloti non s’arrabbiavano né facevano le corna se un pedone uscito dal caffè delle Antille traversava senza guardare, obbligandoli a una secca frenata. Per tacito consenso insomma quella era *la nostra isola, la nostra cittadella*.⁵¹

In the above passage, Luciano claims ownership over this part of Milan, seemingly still untouched by urban progress, through the repetition of the possessive pronoun *nostra*. Car drivers seem to behave accordingly: on the rare occasions in which they venture into Via della Braida, where traffic is normally very light, they slow down respectfully to give way to those who come and go from the many bars and cafés of the area, refraining from honking, making angry gestures and from all the repertoire of their usually aggressive behaviour. It may be argued that Luciano reacts to the complexity and perceived dangerousness of the city by seeking refuge in a well-defined area of Milan, the artistic and bohemian Brera. Later in the novel, he moves out to the periphery, where he feels threatened and confused by the hostility of the environment and pace of urban

⁴⁹ ‘Succede sempre, in tempi di guerre e di rivoluzioni, che un uomo e una donna si amino subito, senza le usuali trafilie del corteggiamento, della parte in casa e delle nozze col velo’ (Ibid., p. 67).

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 97.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 22 (my emphasis).

transformations unfolding all around him. Luciano's preference for seemingly walled and protective spaces within Milan is tied to his rejection of mass consumerist society, embodied by the industrial city.

Nevertheless, Luciano is aware that the limited and somewhat elitist point of view of Braida, with its bohemian and artsy spirit, reflects a false image of the city of Milan. Indeed, he is able to grasp the real essence, or 'il vecchio cuore',⁵² of the city, for the first time only when he moves into a flat on the Milanese periphery with Anna.

Finché fossimo rimasti nell'isola attorno alla Braida del Guercio, della città noi avremmo visto soltanto una fettina esigua, atipica, anzi falsa [...]. Non si capisce Parigi standosene barbicato a Montmartre, né Londra abitando a Chelsea.⁵³

Life in the periphery unveils to Luciano 'la città', the real city, as opposed to the fake image reflected by the somewhat artificial atmosphere of Brera. Here, in the real city, 'fare la vita grigia dei suoi grigi abitanti, essere come loro, soffrire come loro'⁵⁴ becomes possible. In the novel, Milan's modern suburbs are a bleak and melancholic place. In the following extract, for example, the description of a disused freight station, close to the apartment that Luciano and Anna share with a married couple from the Alto Adige, is reminiscent of some pages from Giorgio Scerbanenco's Milanese crime novels (examined in Chapter 3), with their *noir* atmosphere and the presence of destitute humanity and lowlife. Bianciardi effects explicit dehumanisation, as the human element in the extract below is degraded to shadows and larvae, moving frantically.

Di notte si riempiva di larve indistinte in quella scarsa luce frammezzo alla nebbia che si abbioccolava sugli sterpi. A sostare nella strada vicina, le vedevi, contro i lumi opposti e lontani, muoversi, sparire, incontrarsi, dividersi ancora, scomparire. Sul ciglio della strada si fermava a tratti un'automobile coi fanalini di dietro sempre accesi e dentro altre due larve che avvinghiate si contorcevano, grottesche.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., p. 97.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

Opening up to the city beyond the boundaries of Brera ultimately ends up confirming Luciano's inadaptability to metropolitan life, and prompts the feeling of defeat that, in the final pages of the novel, results in the elaboration of Luciano's alternative idea of society. This utopian model of society is based on a radical transformation of people's lives and on the rejection of the false needs created by post-war consumerist culture. As Luciano puts it, 'occorre che la gente impari a non muoversi, a non collaborare, a non produrre, a non farsi nascere bisogni nuovi, e anzi a rinunciare a quelli che ha'.⁵⁶ Halfway between serious and facetious, Luciano's anti-urban utopia is based on reveries of return to an uncorrupted pre-urban condition: a utopian and ultimately impossible escape from the constrictions of modern society, reflected in metropolitan life.

Let us now go back to Milan's city centre. Outside of Brera, one needs to pay close attention to the road to avoid being hit by the heavy car traffic. For this reason, it is easy to overlook the tower blocks of the financial district, which Bianciardi describes as a 'blocco militaresco', made up of 'ponti levatoi', 'muraglie imprendibili', 'camminamenti coperti', and 'aree bertesche'.⁵⁷ The war rhetoric of besieged public spaces is reminiscent of the colonisation of space theorised by Lefebvre, namely the idea that capitalism has increasingly penetrated into everyday life by virtue of the fluidity and pervasiveness of the complex network of communication and money exchange on which global economy is based.⁵⁸ In the framework of his history of space, Lefebvre refers to this as the abstract space of neo-capitalist societies, which mirrors the functioning of capital and is therefore globalised. As Lefebvre puts it, abstract space

includes the 'world of commodities', its 'logic' and its worldwide strategies, as well as the power of money and that of the political state. This space is founded on the vast network of banks, business centres and major productive entities, as also on motorways, airports and information lattices.⁵⁹

Bianciardi's description of the roadworks that proliferate across Milan in the boom years may be seen as a further example of space colonisation. Alongside the new

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 159.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

⁵⁸ In *The Survival of Capitalism*, Lefebvre writes that capitalism 'has subordinated everything to its own operations by extending itself to space as a whole', therefore colonising the everyday (Gregory, p. 364).

⁵⁹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 53.

buildings and housing estates, the post-war era witnessed the construction of the underground, the first line of which was inaugurated in 1964. Ermanno Olmi's 1961 movie *Il posto* immortalises the works for the *metropolitana* in Piazza San Babila, and emphasises the rise of car traffic and noise, for instance in the sequence that features the two young protagonists struggling to cross a congested thoroughfare. The periphery south of the city centre where Luciano and Anna eventually move, presents a constantly changing landscape of roadworks, in which, nearly every day, groups of workmen come to dig new holes.

Intanto sono arrivati gli operai coi picconi e scavano la fossa. [...] Aperta la buca, se ne vanno. Il giorno dopo altri operai provvedono a rimettere a posto la terra scavata, che risulta sempre troppa e fa montarozzo, sicché bisogna far venire il rullo compressore a schiacciarla, e poi un'altra macchina a stendere altro asfalto, bitume e ghiaino. Gli scavatori intanto si sono spostati un poco più in là, sempre sul marciapiede, e scavano una fossa nuova, che sarà riempita puntualmente il giorno dopo.⁶⁰

As may be seen from the above extract, Luciano is struck by the apparent senselessness of the excavations that are repeatedly done and undone, almost on a daily basis. He claims that 'nessuno ha mai saputo perché facciano queste fosse'⁶¹ and even tries a sort of sociological experiment to validate his theory. Pretending to be a roadworker, he digs a hole in the street in the night-time: nobody seems to notice or pay any attention to him, and the following day a group of workmen is already on the spot, undoing his work and filling the hole again.⁶² Luciano's anger at the construction frenzy that has turned Milan into a sort of *città-cantiere*, with deep holes in the pavement and the constant noise of the pneumatic drills, clashes with the passive attitude of the rest of the Milanese population, who simply pass by, interpreting this 'dissennato scavare'⁶³ as a positive sign of

⁶⁰ Bianciardi, *Vita agra*, pp. 166-67.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁶² 'Per motivi di ricerca sociologica ho provato anch'io, una volta, a mettermi panni dimessi, camicia senza colletto, calzoni turchini sporchi di calce, la barba lunga e i capelli scarruffati. Ho provato, in questa tenuta, e munito di piccone, paline bianche e rosse a strisce e lanternino cieco per la notte [...] ho provato a scavare uno spicchio di strada, e poi a lasciarci la buca. Nessuno me lo ha vietato, e anzi il giorno dopo c'erano operai a disfare il mio lavoro, a riempire la mia buca, guidati da un geometra in camicia bianca ma senza cravatta, serio' (*Ibid.*, pp. 167-68).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

progress.⁶⁴ In a similar way, in Fruttero & Lucentini's *La donna della domenica*, which will be examined in the next chapter, the diggers are compared to monster claws that destruct the built environment for destruction's sake.⁶⁵ The result of excessive roadworks, in both *La vita agra* and *La donna della domenica*, is a feeling of oppression and a limitation on the freedom of city dwellers to appropriate their urban environment. Here, too, it is possible to find the idea that urban space is no longer the domain of the human; that humanity has been somehow surpassed.

It is useful at this point to refer to David Harvey's theory of a 'spatial fix', which discusses the economic crises that occur periodically in capitalist societies, due to the cyclical surplus of capital. The latter needs reabsorbing in the built environment through the formation of new territorial configurations, or landscapes of accumulation, which can only be temporary, due to the necessity of these cyclical crises and, therefore, to the contradictory nature of capitalist economy itself. In other words, Harvey explains the process of demolition and reconstruction of the built environment, described in *La vita agra*, as the intervention that capitalism carries out in the landscape, in order to find new territories to allow the circulation of capital and resolve its recurring crises, even if this is only provisional.⁶⁶ It is also worth referring again to Lefebvre's notion of abstract space, which, as the expression of state power, is predicated upon violence. Indeed, in Lefebvre's view, 'every state is born of violence' and 'endures only by virtue of violence directed towards a space'.⁶⁷ In neo-capitalist societies, this violence is tied to the need for expansion that fosters continuous economic growth, along the lines described by Harvey.

Lefebvre's idea of abstract space finds further expression in the way urban spaces are organised in *Memoriale*, in which the city has become a sort of appendix to industry and its work system. *Memoriale* tells the life story of Albino Saluggia, first-person narrator (author of the biographical memoir alluded to in the title) and World War II veteran, who returns from a German prison camp to his place of origin in the countryside near Candia, in Piedmont, and subsequently goes on to find employment in a big company just outside the city of Turin, presumably (though never identified as such in the novel)

⁶⁴ 'Che cosa ci sia sotto nessuno l'ha mai capito bene, ma intanto, dicono, ci ha lavorato un branco di gente, e come si sa il lavoro fa circolare la grana, l'operario spende i dané e se ne avvantaggiano tutti' (Ibid.).

⁶⁵ Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, *La donna della domenica* (Milan: Mondadori, 1972), pp. 226-27.

⁶⁶ Gregory, p. 380. See also John D. Rhodes, 'Antonioni and the Development of Style', in *Antonioni: Centenary Essays*, ed. by L. Rascaroli and J. D. Rhodes (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 276-300 (pp. 282-83). In this essay, Rhodes explores echoes of Harvey's analysis of the intervention of capitalism in the landscape in Antonioni's cinema.

⁶⁷ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 280.

the Ivrea-based Olivetti, where Volponi himself worked as an industrial manager. The narrated facts take place between 1948 and 1956, therefore prior to the proper boom years, which are the focus period of this dissertation. Nevertheless, precisely because it narrates the transition period that leads to the boom, *Memoriale* provides an excellent example for our discussion.

For instance, it is interesting that, in the book, Turin is mostly hinted at and remains in the background. In the mid-1950s, that is at the time in which *Memoriale* is set, most Italians work in the traditional sectors and Italian industry is still underdeveloped.⁶⁸ Outside of the Northern Industrial Triangle, Italy is still largely an agrarian country, with a high number of people employed in agriculture, including Albino's family in the novel. As Ginsborg has noted, still in 1951, 'the elementary combination of electricity, drinking water and an inside lavatory could be found in only 7.4 per cent of Italian households'.⁶⁹ In *Memoriale*, Albino observes that 'la mia è una delle poche case in campagna con l'impianto dell'acqua. Lo fece fare mio padre tornato dalla Francia'.⁷⁰ The urban environment assumes increased centrality in *Le mosche del capitale*, even though the space of industry still prevails in this later novel. In *Le mosche del capitale*, Salisborgo C. and Bovino, where the industrial plants of MFM and Megagruppo are respectively located, are clearly Ivrea and Turin, seats of Olivetti and Fiat. There are many points of connections between *Memoriale* and *Le mosche del capitale*, to the extent that the latter novel may be read as a sort of continuation of the former at a later stage of Italy's industrialisation. It may be argued that both novels ultimately adhere to the image of Turin as *città-azienda* in the shadow of the Fiat and Olivetti plants: an image that will be rejected by Fruttero & Lucentini in favour of a more composite representation of Turin, as we will see in the next chapter.⁷¹

In *Memoriale*, Albino's initial indifference toward, and even rejection of, city life and its values, due to his preference for the simplified lifestyle of the country with its rhythms dictated by the seasons and the time of day, gradually gives way to a more open disposition.⁷² As his factory life proceeds, the stimuli and opportunities that Turin has to

⁶⁸ Ginsborg, p. 210.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Volponi, *Memoriale*, pp. 8-9.

⁷¹ Carloni, p. 83.

⁷² 'Io non potrei vivere in città, pensavo, dove mi sento solo e dove vedo benissimo che la gente è cattiva, troppo furba e interessata. [...] Trovare una strada è una fatica e così sapere dove andare. Io amo la campagna che dice prima, con strade e viottoli, che cosa si deve fare e che si fa vedere tutta, onestamente' (Volponi, *Memoriale*, pp. 13-14).

offer become a welcome distraction from the repetitiveness of work.⁷³ Palmarucci, another character in the novel, also argues in favour of village life over the alienating big city, in a half-drunk monologue with only Albino as his audience. Palmarucci is in cahoots with Dr Fioravanti, a fake healer who extorts a large sum of money from Albino, by pretending to cure his tuberculosis with injections of an allegedly miraculous serum.

Stanno tutti dentro la fabbrica, che non si vede nemmeno. È messa fuori, come da noi i carceri o i cimiteri. A passarle davanti mette paura. In giro ci sono sole donne, vecchi e malati. La domenica poi, non c'è più nessuno. Non ho nemmeno capito da che parte siano le chiese. Meglio un paese; un paese qualunque delle mie parti.⁷⁴

Palmarucci looks back with nostalgia and regret at the small-town life that he has left behind to move North, like many other people in those years, as well as at the occasions for socialising and less sombre atmosphere that he remembers finding around town. Scrivano has focused on the non-compatibility of spaces in *Memoriale*, and particularly on the divide between the countryside and urban-industrial environment, in order to examine the theme of *spaesamento*, that is, the idea of moving away from familiar places which is at the heart of much of Volponi's work (and biography), as well as of Albino's illness, after he abandons the rural world in which he has grown up to join industry.⁷⁵ In the passage quoted above, Turin's streets are almost empty, at this time of day and with everyone at work, as if the factory has sucked the life out of the city. Despite the factory being situated out of the city boundaries and its presence being almost invisible, in the capitalist society, production activities dictate the rhythms of city life, which in turn serves the logic and strategies of industry to foster economic production and the accumulation of capital. It is interesting to note that, in the above passage, the *fabbrica* is compared to a prison and a cemetery, sites that elicit feelings related to illness, death and containment, and are normally hidden on the edges of the city.

⁷³ 'La sera uscivo lentamente dalla fabbrica perché non avevo voglia di correre ancora a prendere il treno, a ricacciarmi in questa altra fabbrica [...] andavo adagio verso il centro della città; passavo un momento in biblioteca, sceglievo a lungo ma senza riuscire a trovare un libro che mi piacesse e camminavo fermandomi davanti a tutti i negozi. [...] Dopo andavo al cinema' (Ibid., pp. 163-64).

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 219.

⁷⁵ Fabrizio Scrivano, 'Individuo, società e territorio nei romanzi di Paolo Volponi: le soluzioni narrative di *Memoriale* e *La strada per Roma*', *Esperienze letterarie*, 25.1 (2000), 88-104.

Memoriale emphasises the divide between the spaces of production and the spaces of leisure, in which the former prevail. As we shall see in greater detail later, in the novel, the immobility and imposing size of the *fabbrica* recur as two of its key features, suggesting that, even though separate from the space of everyday leisure activities, not an integral part of the city but almost a foreign body, the factory building still dominates the city's mental environment.

La fabbrica in quel posto è costruita e in quello stesso posto resterà; non entrerà mai nel paese, non avrà mai un mercato davanti, una fiera, dei crocchi di persone, i fiori le fontane, un porticato. Davanti non si fermerà nessuno, solo chi starà male o chi lavorerà o non avrà un lavoro.⁷⁶

In the space allocated to industry and economic production, there is no room for the recognisable features and activities that are traditionally associated with city life, such as local markets, festivals or the kind of user-friendly architecture, which encourages social interactions and ensures that people are able to orient themselves in the city. In terms of the organisation of urban spaces, industry thus produces a separate environment, regulated by rhythms and rules that respond to the needs of a developing economic system and that influence city life with its own rhythms and rules. As Lefebvre has shown, human practices, and especially economic activities, shape space in different ways. A social reality with capability and resources, which is to say with 'productive forces, technology and knowledge, means of labour',⁷⁷ may therefore produce a new type of space. The novels under scrutiny in this chapter are concerned with the space of capitalist power, which perpetuates itself through the continued process of capital accumulation.

In *Le mosche del capitale*, Turin's fictional counterpart, Bovino, is described as 'la città sottomessa':⁷⁸ presumably subjugated to the logic of capital. In this regard, it is interesting to comment on the connotations of 'bovino' as an adjective, which evokes dullness and unconditional obedience. The identity of Turin is bound to the presence of the Fiat, Italy's giant automotive industry that dominated car production, 'in many ways the propulsive sector of the economy', in the post-war years.⁷⁹ In the novel, we mostly get glimpses of Bovino from the windows of the corporate headquarters that occupy a

⁷⁶ Volponi, *Memoriale*, p. 262.

⁷⁷ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 115.

⁷⁸ Volponi, *Mosche*, p. 125.

⁷⁹ Ginsborg, p. 215.

dominant position in the city: a view from on high that reverses Bianciardi's street-level gaze.⁸⁰ The principle, however, remains the same: the verticality of buildings refers symbolically to the authority of a 'potentially violent power'.⁸¹ In *Le mosche del capitale*, the Turinese upper classes inhabit *palazzi* that are 'opportunamente adattati a sfruttare quella posizione urbana assai densa e fertile',⁸² while the working class generally occupies the tower blocks and cheap houses that have recently developed in destitute areas of the city, in a proletarian trend toward suburbanisation that Turin shares with Milan.⁸³ Thus, in the novel, urban geography and housing distribution confirm the city's economic and social divide. Mario Sechi has observed that, in Volponi's oeuvre, the contradictions of industrial development are reflected in 'una specie di malattia degenerativa della crescita urbanistica'.⁸⁴ As Sechi puts it, 'l'organismo urbano sembra impotente a ricucire e a suturare le lacerazioni che la crescita puramente quantitativa degli spazi edificati, e l'ammassamento di nuove ondate migratorie, hanno prodotto'.⁸⁵ In the boom years, one can observe a process of expulsion of the working class from the cores of the main capital cities, in order to make them available 'for luxury housing and administrative offices.'⁸⁶ However, a strict dual model of the city, supported by Marxist scholarship on the basis of the idea that different urban areas are distributed according to wealth and socio-economic factors, fails to consider other factors that concur to shape the geography of the city – such as gender, sexuality and ethnic background – and alone proves insufficient to account for the complexity of urban transformations. Moreover, urban spaces are not fixed, but by their nature inherently heterogenous and constantly redrawn. That said, there is no doubt that city cores concentrate wealth (as the dominion of the privileged classes), power (through the presence of institutional buildings) and tradition (monuments as signifiers that convey meaning related to a social group's

⁸⁰ In this regard, see Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*: 'A good sovereign [...] is someone well placed within a territory, and a territory that is well policed in terms of its obedience to the sovereign is a territory that has a good spatial layout' (p. 15).

⁸¹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 98.

⁸² Volponi, *Mosche*, p. 18.

⁸³ In this regard, see for instance the description of Milan's *coree* in John Foot, 'Revisiting the *Coree*. Self-construction, Memory and Immigration on the Milanese Periphery, 1950-2000', in *Italian Cityscapes*, ed. by Lumley and Foot, pp. 46-60; and Rome's *borgate* in John D. Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City: Pasolini's Rome* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 2.

⁸⁴ Mario Sechi, 'Centri e periferie di città in Pier Paolo Pasolini e Paolo Volponi', *Urbanistica*, 125 (2004), 90-96 (pp. 94-95).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Gianfranco Petrillo, 'The Two Waves: Milan as a City of Immigration, 1955-1995', in *Italian Cityscapes*, ed. by Lumley and Foot, pp. 31-45 (p. 39).

collective identity and national history).⁸⁷ As will also become clear from the following section, focused on the representation of industrial architecture and modern buildings in the texts under scrutiny, the literary descriptions of urban spaces examined in this chapter are always tied to the criticism of the bourgeois capitalism of the North and the consumerist society born out of Italy's post-war economic development.

2.3 Industrial Architecture

In Lefebvre's words, modern buildings are 'the homogeneous matrix of capitalistic space', which combine control, power and economic profit.⁸⁸ Moreover, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Lefebvre argues that the rational space of modern capitalist societies is founded on the logic of visualisation, that is, the predominance of the eye over other senses, by which, for instance, the verticality of buildings becomes a reminder of the authority of state power.⁸⁹ The high-rise buildings that spring up in Milan in response to the extraordinary development of tertiary industry, and are immortalised in *La vita agra*, become a trademark of the city as financial capital. It is worth noting that *La vita agra* was written in the same years that witness the creation, in Milan, of the Pirelli (1961) and Velasca (1960) towers, which spark debate concerning the diverse interpretations of modernism in architecture.⁹⁰ The 'Pirellone', 'far and away the most daring modernist skyscraper in Italy',⁹¹ is one of the iconographic symbols of the boom: it famously features also in the initial sequence of Michelangelo Antonioni's movie *La notte* (1961) with the surrounding skyscrapers and highways reflected by its glass surface, all indices of Milan's rapid industrial growth.⁹² In a way that resembles Bianciardi's descriptions of industrial architecture and building materials, Antonioni's style 'constitutes itself by

⁸⁷ 'The dominant form of space, that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces), and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there. [...] monuments have a phallic aspect, towers exude arrogance, and the bureaucratic and political authoritarianism immanent to a repressive space is everywhere' (Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 49). See also Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, ed. and trans. by E. Kofman and E. Lebas (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), p. 73.

⁸⁸ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 227.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁹⁰ See Halldóra Arnardóttir, 'Architecture and Modernity in Post-war Milan', in *Italian Cityscapes*, ed. by Lumley and Foot, pp. 90-99.

⁹¹ Rhodes, 'Antonioni and the Development of Style', p. 286.

⁹² *Ibid.*

staring into and at [...] the surfaces of objects whose existence is predicated on and proclaims Italy's accelerated entry into and competition in the global economy'.⁹³ As shown in the following extract, Bianciardi's descriptions of the skyscrapers rely on a futuristic and dystopian aesthetic in order to express that these megastructures are the spatial concretisation of industrial capitalism and political bureaucracy with their inherent degree of social inequality.

Raro perciò che ci si avveda del torraccione irto in cima di parafulmini, antenne, radar. Solo a tratti, quando fa specchio il sole su quel lucido, ti accade di levare gli occhi verso il torraccione di vetro e d'alluminio, di vedere una strada privata ingombra di auto in sosta, stranamente tacita in quel quartiere centrale, di girare attorno all'isolato, scoprendo un'intera cittadella – tre o quattro torraccioni simili, di vetro, di alluminio, di pietra lustrata.⁹⁴

The 'torraccione di vetro e d'alluminio' that Luciano intends to blow up – and that arguably embodies the fusion of the Pirelli building and the Montecatini head office in Via della Moscova, the latter designed by Giò Ponti and completed in 1938 – is a hostile and uncanny entity. Its smooth and impenetrable surfaces almost belie its human manufacture. With the lighting conductor on the top, it is reminiscent of another grotesque and sinister building, the Villa Pirobutirro in Gadda's *La cognizione del dolore*. In the above passage, the emphasis on the changing scale of the built environment and on modern building materials, clearly hints at feelings of alienation and inhumanity. The office blocks and skyscrapers are the main target of Luciano's personal war on the new Milan, for they concentrate wealth, power and influence, and concretise capitalist relations of power. Luciano imagines 'i cervelli, lo stato maggiore',⁹⁵ that is, the small group of technocrats and industrial chiefs with full decision-making power in their hands, who work behind the translucent windows of the multinational corporations headquartered in Milan. The decisions taken by this industrial elite impact on the urban and national scale, as shown by the example of the forty-three miners killed in the Tuscan mine of Ribolla, since, writes Bianciardi, 'dalla sede centrale premevano, circolari su

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Bianciardi, *Vita agra*, p. 38.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

circolari, a chiedere che non si sprecasse un uomo, una tonnellata, un giorno lavorativo'.⁹⁶ It is appropriate at this point to refer once again to Lefebvre and his idea of the capitalist city as the 'centre of decision-making and the centre of consumption'.⁹⁷ Lefebvre's definition relies on the fact that, as in the Milan portrayed in *La vita agra*, modern cities' business cores concentrate financial and political power on a global basis, and that this 'domination of and by centrality' requires new forms of regulation and social control.⁹⁸ With regard to the Italian case, arguably this is especially true for Milan, which has been a major industrial centre since Italy's first industrial revolution at the beginning of the nineteenth century and which, after the boom, has assumed the role of financial capital of the country.⁹⁹

The changing proportion of urban spaces elicits feelings of estrangement, while the functionality of modern construction materials hints at the anonymity and violence of the industrial city, in *La vita agra* as well as in *Silenzio a Milano* (1958), written in the same years by Anna Maria Ortese. In the latter, the initial description of Milan's Stazione Centrale, a monument to the industrial city, lingers on the exact measurements of height and surface area, and on the description of the construction materials. The impressive height of the arrival hall and the steel canopies make it resemble a cathedral or a mountain to those who arrive from the villages of Southern Italy or the rural provinces of the North, and are not familiar with this architecture of power.¹⁰⁰ As the industrial city undergoes rapid transformations, the changes in modern architectural proportions alter the way in which city-users perceive the built environment and may affect their ability to relate empathetically to it.¹⁰¹ One consequence of this is that feelings of anxiety are projected onto buildings, which are assigned their own, uncanny qualities. Thus, the uncanny becomes one of the distinguishing traits of urban modernity, as will be explored in the next chapter.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

⁹⁷ Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, p. 161.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ See in particular Foot, *Milan Since the Miracle*.

¹⁰⁰ Anna Maria Ortese, *Silenzio a Milano* (Bari: Laterza, 1958).

¹⁰¹ Will Self, 'Will Self on the Meaning of Skyscrapers: From the Tower of Babel to the Shard', <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/27/will-self-on-the-meaning-of-skyscrapers>> [accessed 20 May 2015].

Milan Stazione Centrale is emblematic of the process in which urban sites and buildings are invested with their own qualities.¹⁰² As the main gateway through which masses of people and material goods enter and leave Milan in the boom years, the station becomes ‘an emblem of the new process of industrialisation of the country and mass internal migration’.¹⁰³ The opening scene of Visconti’s movie *Rocco e i suoi Fratelli* (1960) features a Southern family arriving in Milan, and, in a way that recalls Ortese’s description mentioned above, also lingers on the stone and marble entrance hall of the station, in order to emphasise the contrast between modernist architecture, conveying values of progress and economic power, and the family’s humble conditions. In his crime story ‘Stazione centrale ammazzare subito’ (1969), Giorgio Scerbanenco describes the Stazione Centrale as ‘un pianeta a sé’ and ‘una riserva di pellerossa nel mezzo della città.’¹⁰⁴ In the 1960s, the station becomes a focal point for travellers and commuters, a place of socialisation for the groups of immigrants and workers who gather in the cafés of the adjacent square,¹⁰⁵ but also a transit site where crime and illegality can develop more easily. In *La vita agra*, the station is the arrival point of the ‘treni del sonno’ that every day, in the early morning, carry crowds of workers from the villages of the hinterland into the city.¹⁰⁶ Once again by means of a military metaphor, Bianciardi describes them as ‘battaglioni di gente grigia, con gli occhi gonfi, in marcia spalla a spalla verso il tram’.¹⁰⁷

In Volponi’s novels, buildings possess a similar estranging quality. In *Memoriale*, the *fabbrica* subsumes a whole repertoire of uncanny properties. Some descriptions, like the one quoted below, emphasise the analogy with the human body. Here the *fabbrica* itself is a gigantic body with grotesque anthropomorphic traits and fragmented body parts.

Aspettavo soprattutto di entrare nel corpo della fabbrica, di arrivare di fronte alle macchine, alla bocca del rumore.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Vidler argues that ‘the “uncanny” is not a property of the space itself nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial conformation; it is, in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection’ (p. 11).

¹⁰³ Giuliana Pieri, ‘Milano nera: Representing and Imagining Milan in Italian *Noir* and Crime Fiction’, in *Italian Crime Fiction*, ed. by Pieri, pp. 132-50 (p. 137).

¹⁰⁴ Giorgio Scerbanenco, *Milano calibro 9* (Milan: Garzanti, 1969), p. 93.

¹⁰⁵ Foot, pp. 7-8.

¹⁰⁶ Bianciardi, *Vita agra*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁸ Volponi, *Memoriale*, p. 27.

Other, more frequent descriptions borrow elements from the natural world, so as to suggest that the *fabbrica* exists in an immutable reality beyond the human realm, from which it imposes its own laws and order on the city and its inhabitants. *Memoriale* is literally dominated by the presence of the *fabbrica*, which is ‘grande più della stessa città’.¹⁰⁹ Through images that are reminiscent of Lefebvre’s logic of visualisation, the novel keeps returning to the imposing and somewhat threatening size of the factory, which spoils the view of the countryside and fronts right onto the pavement.

La fabbrica, grandissima e bassa, ronzava indifferente, ferma come il lago di Candia in certe sere in cui è il solo, in mezzo a tutto il paesaggio, ad avere luce. Nemmeno in Germania avevo visto una fabbrica così grande; così tutta grande subito sulla strada.¹¹⁰

Like the calm water of the Candia lake, indifferent to Albino’s thoughts when, in his many sleepless nights, he observes the reflections of moonlight on its surface, the *fabbrica* remains deaf to his protests and anguish. Industry shares with nature the indifference to human suffering.

Further analogies are made with institutions and apparatuses of Italian public life. In continuation of the extract cited above, the *fabbrica* is compared to a church and a courthouse; its governing body to political power and ecclesiastical authorities. It should be noted that the Catholic Church is still exerting a dominant influence over Italian society of those years. Moreover, the passage contains another element of uncanny anthropomorphisation, the incessant noise of industrial machinery resembling someone with shortness of breath after running a lap.

La fabbrica era invece immobile come una chiesa o un tribunale, e si sentiva da fuori che dentro, proprio come in una chiesa, in un dentro alto e vuoto, si svolgevano le funzioni di centinaia di lavori. Dopo un momento il lavoro sembrava tutto uguale; la fabbrica era tutta uguale e da qualsiasi parte mandava lo stesso rumore, più che un rumore, un affanno, un ansimare forte.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

The opening scene of *Le mosche del capitale* has echoes of these descriptions. It captures the city dwellers asleep and unaware, while the energy system of capitalism, here embodied by a gigantic calculator, works relentlessly, fuelling economic expansion and urban growth. Bovino has taken on its own life or, more appropriately, the life of capital.

La grande città industriale riempie la notte di febbraio senza luna, tre ore prima dell'alba. Dormono tutti o quasi, e anche coloro che sono svegli giacciono smemorati e persi. [...] Il sonno si spande senza alcuna innocenza, e non per fisico gravame, ma come ulteriore dato e calcolo delle compatibilità favorevoli al capitale. Tutta la città gli è sottoposta; così ciascun dormiente, ciascuno nel suo posto e letto, nel proprio sonno come in quello più grande e generale che si svuota di vapori. Il calcolatore guida e controlla, concede rincorre codifica assume imprime.¹¹²

This is a numb sleep, without memory or dreams, not innocent but blameworthy, as if the whole urban population was to be held accountable for letting capital perpetrate its injustices in the name of modernisation and profit. Indeed, in the novel, money economy grows and fosters urban development at the price of increasing exploitation and marginalisation of the lower classes within the city. Compared to *Memoriale*, the city of Turin has become more central to the narration. It is, however, a city that has turned inward, where traditional urban features and references have become fainter. As a result, in *Le mosche del capitale*, Turin seems difficult to navigate and conceptualise.

As Lehan puts it, in late capitalist societies, 'the money system has become so complex that it should be thought of as more a self-enclosed, self-energizing system than as anything material'.¹¹³ The dematerialisation of space in modern capitalist societies brings about a crisis of representation. Through the character of Astolfo, in *Le mosche del capitale*, Volponi voices the idea that the literary form of the novel is inadequate to portray the transformations of the city in the advanced phase of capitalist development.

¹¹² Volponi, *Mosche*, pp. 5-6.

¹¹³ Lehan, p. 273.

Astolfo dolente e ispirato gli mostra la città dalla vetrata centrale del suo ufficio all'undicesimo piano. Recita che è brutta e che abbrutisce anche l'industria. È così brutta e sfatta che non è più raccontabile.¹¹⁴

Astolfo looking down on the city from his office on the eleventh floor of the corporate building, confirms what has been stated earlier about the fact that, in the novel, Turin is often seen from on high and from the privileged point of view of the industrial elite. The idea of the city as a coherent whole, which could find room in the traditional novel, is not conceivable in the 'cultura industriale avanzata', where space is abstract and fleeting. It would therefore take a completely new form, able to break with traditional modes of representation, to mimic the new urban reality. Cinema, more than literature, may be apt to do so, since, as an artistic form, it is inclined to experimentalism and the use of innovative styles and techniques. Here, one may also detect Volponi's polemics against the Italian literary establishment, in those years still largely anchored to the past and to traditional modes of representation.

Ma non crede che anch'io leggerei volentieri e con attenzione un buon romanzo nuovo, capace di vera novità... un romanzo nuovo sulla città? Posso anche arrivare a sperarlo, ma non me lo aspetto... più probabile un film... un film di cultura industriale avanzata... un film newyorkese... non certo un film italiano... il cinema romano... oppure un film, tutto diverso, di rottura.¹¹⁵

The dominant organisation of space that has been discussed in the first two sections of this chapter, is linked to 'the question of the passivity and silence of the "users" of space'.¹¹⁶ The following section explores this issue in more detail, by drawing on Foucault's notions of bio-politics and apparatus. This is the section of the chapter in which there emerges more clearly the issue of Fascist legacies in the post-war Republic, together with the idea of a new sort of totalitarianism that is dictated by the needs of productivity, in the urban-industrial society of Northern Italy. As I have done before, I will begin by

¹¹⁴ Volponi, *Mosche*, p. 122.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 122. Astolfo goes on to say: 'Lei vorrebbe per sé la città, il racconto, tutto ciò che unisce... Tutto per sé, da non poterli distinguere... che non avrebbero vite diverse... Ecco perché non crede più al romanzo... Ogni romanzo sarebbe un attacco al suo totale... un pezzo portato via... e raccontare cose distanti e con lingua esterna e ferma sarebbe inutile e ripetitivo' (Ibid.).

¹¹⁶ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 56.

focusing on *La vita agra* and will subsequently go on to analyse the connections and similarities with Volponi's *Memoriale* and *Le mosche del capitale*.

2.4 State Control: Bio-politics and Apparatus

Coppola and Piccinini have argued that 'nella sua opera Bianciardi si misura con i nuovi dispositivi di controllo biopolitico, che coincide con l'affermarsi, proprio in quel tempo, della società dei consumi'.¹¹⁷ In *La vita agra*, this discourse is indeed deeply intertwined with the theme of productivity, the core value of the Milanese urban society, which requires controlling citizens and their economic performance. In this regard, Bianciardi's analysis of the post-war economic boom proves particularly interesting.

Faranno insorgere bisogni mai sentiti prima. [...] Purché tutti lavorino, purché siano pronti a scarpinare, a fare polvere, a pestare i piedi, a tafanarsi l'un l'altro dalla mattina alla sera.¹¹⁸

The new *benessere* demands constant productivity and, therefore, ultimately boosts competition and the exploitation of the Italian workforce. All residents in Milan are expected to contribute to urban development through their labour and by paying taxes, which are in many cases beyond their economic means.¹¹⁹

The preservation of the dominant social order, in modern capitalist societies, requires continued productivity and, consequently, new forms of social control. The *torracchione* of *La vita agra* is a modern version of the Panopticon. It is equipped with a surveillance camera that is able to acquire all information about the people entering the building. In front of its entrance, the security guards, described as 'ex-carabinieri e secondini di Portolongone allontanati dal corpo per eccesso di rigore, bluastri in faccia e con gli occhi cattivi',¹²⁰ recall a Fascist squad, ready to expel any unwanted intruder. Foucault's panopticism as a model of permanent control, draws on the interdependency of order and visibility, which is realised through a specific architectural configuration.

¹¹⁷ Coppola and Piccinini, p. xxxiv.

¹¹⁸ Bianciardi, *Vita agra*, p. 157.

¹¹⁹ 'Dovevo contribuire nella misura delle mie possibilità allo sviluppo urbano' (Ibid., p. 141).

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

Theorised by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham, the Panopticon is a circular building with the watchman placed at the centre and the cells running along the perimeter: the staff of the institution can virtually see everyone at all times, whereas the inmates are not able to see through their cells. The principle of the constant visibility of the inmate by the invigilator ensures the automatic functioning of power through mind conditioning, for the inmates know that, potentially, they could be watched at all times.¹²¹ As such, the Panopticon is not a real historic prison, but rather a diagram, or architectural figure, which is never fully applicable in reality. As a generalisable model, it responds to the need of state power to rationalise space in order to exert more easily its control over the social body.

Foucault's discourse on spatial organisation as constitutive of power reverberates in *La vita agra* through the descriptions of industrial architecture and urban spaces that have been examined above, and through the representation of road traffic, the rise of which is fostered by modern street planning. Indeed, *La vita agra* establishes a clear equation between movement and the productivity rates that are imposed on the population. As Foucault points out, the effective exercise of power relies on the increased movement 'of ideas, of wills, and of orders, and also commercial circulation.'¹²² In *La vita agra*, 'il traffico astioso della città' is a further indicator of the repressive character of the modern city. Bearing in mind Foucault's definition of apparatus, or *dispositif*, as a set of practices and strategies that aim to obtain territorial security and normalisation by controlling the 'uncertain' and, primarily, the social body,¹²³ it can be argued that the way in which movement and car traffic are organised and regulated, in *La vita agra*, links the functioning of the modern city to that of the apparatus. On the one hand, Bianciardi argues that modern transport only guarantees a false freedom of movement, for it allocates people to specific areas and itineraries within the city, chiefly the journey from home to work, and vice versa.¹²⁴ Moreover, he observes that this limited freedom comes literally

¹²¹ David Murakami Wood, 'Beyond the Panopticon? Foucault and Surveillance Studies', in *Space, Knowledge and Power*, ed. by Crampton and Elden, pp. 245-63 (p. 248).

¹²² Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 15.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 11. As Agamben puts it, 'I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings'. Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?: And Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 14.

¹²⁴ Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, p. 5.

with a price, for not everyone can afford to own a car and even public transport is costly for the average commuter in 1960s Milan.

Presi il tram per andare in ufficio [...]. D'ora in poi ogni giorno avrei fatto quattro corse identiche sul tram, c'era il tesserino settimanale per lo sconto, lo davano in ufficio e quei pochi quattrini te li trattenevano poi sullo stipendio a fine mese, così era assicurata la libertà di movimento.¹²⁵

On the other hand, the rise of car traffic marginalises a specific category of city-practitioners, the pedestrians, relegating them to 'una fettuccia di marciapiede minacciata dallo straripare del traffico'.¹²⁶ Hence, we can see that movement within the city is regulated with the aim of enhancing efficiency.

It does not come as a surprise that, as he arrives in Milan, the narrator of *L'integrazione* (who once again retraces Bianciardi's actual journey from Tuscany) is especially struck by the expressways of the Northern capital, starkly different from the streets of his hometown, where people come together and socialise at a much slower pace.

Non c'è dunque motivo di meraviglia se di quest'altra città, nuova, grande, importante, a noi che ci arrivammo con un balzo solo di cinquecento chilometri, prima e più di ogni altra cosa sembrassero differenti le strade. Ci sorprese anzitutto la scarsa parte che di ogni strada toccava a noi pedoni.¹²⁷

Modern street planning, mostly influenced by theories on the rational distribution of space developed by Le Corbusier, celebrates traffic and the rise of mobility while limiting the walkability of the city.¹²⁸ Arguably, this undermines the ability of city-users to renegotiate spatial relations of power. Indeed, as Michel de Certeau argues, space can be truly appropriated through microspatial practises, and especially through the act of walking, by creating shortcuts and selecting alternative itineraries.¹²⁹ *La vita agra* shows that movement, in Milan, replicates relations of power within the city, for it is elitist and

¹²⁵ Bianciardi, *Vita agra*, p. 96.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹²⁷ Luciano Bianciardi, *L'integrazione* (Milan: Bompiani, 1960), pp. 10-11.

¹²⁸ Nicholas R. Fyfe, 'Introduction: Reading the Street', in *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity and Control in Public Space*, ed. by N. R. Fyfe (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 1-10 (pp. 2-3).

¹²⁹ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 97-105.

largely the prerogative of those who can afford a car or the cost of public transport. Consequently, as we shall see below, the novel presents the act of walking as a way to truly appropriate urban spaces, which, as such, is seen with suspicion and is opposed by city authorities.

Foucault explains that apparatuses are a constellation of practices and strategies of power that aim, on the one hand, to control the social body and their conduct, in order to increase efficiency and productivity, and on the other, to activate a mechanism of self-regulation and instil passivity, relying on the fact that these technologies of power operate constantly, as in the case of Bentham's Panopticon discussed above.¹³⁰ In *La vita agra*, the mobility system follows a principle of spatial rationality and regulation, and affects the behaviour of car drivers and passers-by. The latter, 'troppo occupati a passare [...] nella loro marcia quotidiana',¹³¹ assume the contours of the blasé metropolitan crowd that populates early sociological studies and the literary imagination, at least from Baudelaire onwards. The secretaries, a new professional figure developed from booming post-war business, 'picchiettano dalla mattina alla sera, coi tacchi a spillo, sugli impiantiti lucidati a cera, e poi su un pezzetto di marciapiede, fino alla fermata del tram'.¹³² As for car drivers, behind the wheel they undergo a sort of animalistic mutation, with their cars, also described as 'lupi', turning into a prosthetic extension of their body.¹³³ Luciano even observes that it is possible to determine the day of the week by the particular way in which car drivers unleash their anger on the streets of Milan: 'rabbiosi sempre, il lunedì la loro ira è alacre e scattante, stanca e inviperita il sabato'.¹³⁴ As seen at the beginning of the chapter, Luciano's affiliation with Brera also relies on the lack of road traffic, which contributes to assigning to the area positive connotations of safety and domesticity.

The Milanese, in *La vita agra*, do not walk: rather, they march mindlessly at a round pace. Consequently, Luciano's incompatibility with metropolitan life is reaffirmed through his way of walking, which is on the contrary slow and meditative, thus unconventional. This kind of wandering is apparently inefficient and, as such, cannot be accommodated in a disciplinary spatial regime that requires productivity. It will be helpful to refer once again to Foucault and his notion of bio-politics, to explain why, in

¹³⁰ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 14.

¹³¹ Bianciardi, *Vita agra*, p. 78.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

modern societies, unproductive existences must be managed and regulated. Foucault has shown that, with the beginning of the modern era, the system of power shifts from the control of the borders (sovereignty) to that of the social body and the mechanisms of production and reproduction (discipline), in order to perpetuate the power relations of the dominant socio-political system.¹³⁵ Thus, life itself becomes an object of power.¹³⁶ In *La vita agra*, Luciano's 'unproductive' way of walking challenges the idea of efficiency at the heart of the Milanese urban-industrial society.

Hanno ragione quelli che dicono che io sono rozzo, che non mi so muovere. È vero, io non so nemmeno camminare, e una volta mi arrestarono per strada, soltanto perché non so camminare. E poi mi licenziarono, per lo stesso motivo.¹³⁷

A parallel may once again be established with Michelangelo Antonioni's cinema and its aesthetic of waste and excess. Schoonover has pointed out that Antonioni fills the frame with uneconomical objects that appear to have no narrative or semantic utility, in order to challenge the spectator's eye, trained to find a coherent meaning.¹³⁸ In a similar way, Luciano's inefficient and aimless movements challenge a social system that is reluctant 'to consider the uneconomical or unjustified'.¹³⁹

The following extract explains more clearly the circumstances in which Luciano gets arrested while walking on the streets of Milan. Unlike the stream of robotic passers-by hurrying to work, Luciano pauses, goes back and observes his surroundings. This 'odd' attitude makes him resemble something of a maverick in the eyes of the rest of the Milanese population, and therefore ends up attracting the attention of the metropolitan police.

Io non cammino, non marcio: strascico i piedi, io, mi fermo per strada, addirittura torno indietro, guardo di qua e guardo di là, anche quando non c'è da traversare. Sorpreso in atteggiamento sospetto, diceva appunto al

¹³⁵ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 12.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹³⁷ Bianciardi, *Vita agra*, pp. 109-10.

¹³⁸ Karl Schoonover, 'Antonioni's Waste Management', in *Antonioni*, ed. by. Rascaroli and Rhodes, pp. 235-53 (pp. 235-39).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

telefono quel maresciallo del buon costume, dopo che mi ebbe fermato, caricato sul furgone nero e portato in questura.¹⁴⁰

Walking can be a way to subjectively appropriate urban spaces. As such, it is penalised in an urban system that encourages uniformity, conformity and lack of individuality, in order to adapt to the demands of city life. Luciano observes that, after they have lived in Milan for some time, people start to move about and function like automatons, deprived of vitality: ‘scivolano sul marciapiede rapidi e senza rumore, si fermano appena al saluto, con un sorriso scialbo (e anche dall’esterno, se guardi bene sono già un poco diversi, cioè impinguati e sbiancati)’.¹⁴¹

The factory environment, in *Memoriale*, appears to have a similar effect on people. An analogy with the hasty passers-by described by Bianciardi may be found in the image of the workers that leave the *fabbrica* after work. Tired and numb at the end of their shift, they part hurriedly, oblivious to what is going on around them.

Improvvisamente la gente cominciò a uscire [...]. Molti si buttavano sulle biciclette e sui motorscooter; altri andavano a piedi di qua e di là sui marciapiedi, sicurissimi per una direzione che sembravano aver preso a caso.¹⁴²

Very much like Milan in *La vita agra*, in *Memoriale*, industry represents a repressive space, in which discipline plays an essential role in maintaining workers in a passive and apathetic state, in order to ensure the discharge of their duties. The novel contains many references to Albino’s experience as a prisoner of war in Germany. On numerous occasions, the novel presents factory life as a continuation of the experience of war and, particularly, of Albino’s period of internment in the German labour camp.¹⁴³ For instance, Albino observes that ‘mai come durante il lavoro io ho pensato alla prigionia [...] e sempre di più alle cose che sarebbero potute accadere che a quelle che in realtà mi

¹⁴⁰ Bianciardi, *Vita agra*, p. 110.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁴² Volponi, *Memoriale*, p. 23.

¹⁴³ A few examples may be: ‘Il treno partiva verso sera ed era un treno operaio che fermava a tutte le stazioni. Era affollato come una tradotta militare, soprattutto da operai che lasciavano le fabbriche di Torino’ (*Ibid.*, p. 12); ‘Io avevo paura di questo inizio, soprattutto paura che la fabbrica potesse assomigliare all’esercito’ (*Ibid.*, p. 53); ‘[Gli operai] vestivano tutti allo stesso modo, o così mi sembrava per l’uniformità dell’ambiente, delle macchine e del lavoro che poteva annullare le piccole differenze’ (*Ibid.*, p. 55).

accadevano'.¹⁴⁴ During the preliminary meeting that Albino has with the hiring manager on his first day of work, the parallel between the factory and military spheres emerges once again.

Tu hai fatto il soldato per molti anni e conosci il valore della disciplina e dell'ubbidienza. Queste due virtù sono basilari anche nella fabbrica.¹⁴⁵

The manager points out that discipline and obedience are central values in the army as well as in the factory and that, therefore, as a former soldier, Albino will find it easier to adjust to the rhythms and requirements of industrial work. For Albino, the factory environment becomes a new battlefield, in which to prove once and for all his value, by throwing himself wholeheartedly into his new job. As he puts it, 'nella fabbrica avevo il mio campo di battaglia.'¹⁴⁶ In this way, he thinks, he will demonstrate that he is better and more efficient than his colleagues. No wonder this restless approach to work will soon lead him to physical and mental exhaustion, and therefore to numerous admissions to hospital, following the advice of the factory doctors. With regard to his job, Albino lives in a state of dissociation and acute internal conflict: he seems to alternately praise and defend, and fiercely oppose and loathe industry and its mechanisms. This conflict almost reaches madness: 'la fabbrica mi sembrava un edificio senza senso e sentivo che una parte del mio cervello stava facendo violenza su di me per trattenermi in quel luogo ostile e innaturale'.¹⁴⁷

The analogy between war and factory life represents one of the main themes of the novel. Albino, the first-person narrator and main advocate of this idea, is suffering from paranoia and blatant persecution mania and may therefore be seen as a classic example of unreliable narrator, who is bound to cast doubt on the truth of the narrated facts. While this is certainly true to an extent (for instance, Albino's idea that the factory doctors have diagnosed him with fake illnesses and prescribed periods of leave to keep him away from work, is clearly a delusion), there are broader and more complex issues at stake in the point of view expressed by him as narrator of the story. Indeed, it may be argued that Albino embodies an urban-industrial malaise that is rooted in capitalist

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 160.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

societies and, specifically, in post-war Italy.¹⁴⁸ Interestingly, in the incipit of the book, it is pointed out that the narrated facts are not related only to a single and specific city, but are instead generalisable, for ‘la città industriale non ha identità’.¹⁴⁹ In other words, the main traits and mechanisms of the industrial city described in *Memoriale*, are common to any big city in the era of global capitalism, which, as has been seen, is what Lefebvre holds in his theory of abstract space. Later in his memoir, Albino reiterates this concept once again.

Il problema è quello dell’industria in generale, tutta, dalle sue città e quartieri ai treni e ai pullman che la servono, alle sue fotografie sui giornali, ai suoi operai, tanti come un esercito, come il mio lago, che batte la testa sempre sulla stessa sponda.¹⁵⁰

It is interesting to note the presence, in the above extract, of the same military metaphor of the factory workers resembling an army in disarray, which we also found in the ‘battaglioni di gente grigia’, described by Bianciardi

The end of *Memoriale*, too, seems to confirm the idea that Albino’s malaise is more generally rooted in society. After all the issues that he has created because of his instability and after all the efforts that the factory doctors have made to facilitate his recovery, despite the fact that he has even gone to the company chairman to denounce their supposedly persecutory behaviour, Albino gets fired for helping the workers on strike, by asking the kitchen staff to join them and go on strike as well. We readers are left with the doubt that Albino was right after all: if there is no real conspiracy toward him, it is nonetheless true that industry does not work for the good of its workers and in their own interest. Quite the contrary, Albino’s illness and obsession feed on the very environment of the factory and blur into the kind of alienation that is typical of such repetitive and isolating work. In the novel, this sense of estrangement and the power that the *fabbrica* holds over workers, are particularly embodied by the incessant noise of

¹⁴⁸ Volponi has thus explained the choice of Albino Saluggia as the main character in *Memoriale*: ‘Perché ho scelto un nevrotico a protagonista del mio romanzo? Un nevrotico ha una capacità di interpretazione della realtà più dolente, ma più acuta [...], ma anche perché un nevrotico è *un ribelle*. In un uomo sano avrei trovato uno che ha già ceduto qualcosa alla fabbrica’. Gian Carlo Ferretti, *Paolo Volponi* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1972), p. 29.

¹⁴⁹ Volponi, *Memoriale*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-77.

industrial machinery. This ‘rumore che cade addosso come una doccia’¹⁵¹ is a constant backdrop throughout the book, as exemplified also in the extract below.

Il rumore mi rapiva; il sentire andare tutta la fabbrica con un solo motore mi trascinava e mi obbligava a tenere con il mio lavoro il ritmo che tutta la fabbrica aveva. Non potevo trattenermi, come una foglia di un grande albero scosso in tutti i suoi rami dal vento.¹⁵²

It does not come as a complete surprise that, at the end of the novel, Albino finds himself in complete agreement with the demands for improvement of the *fabbrica* working conditions, outlined in a flyer that has been distributed by members of the FIOM union during the workers’ industrial action. As Albino confesses, ‘mi pareva di averlo scritto io, parola per parola.’¹⁵³ Albino is frustrated in his hope to find in the factory more than it ultimately can offer, that is, a compensation for his existential sense of non-belonging. His disillusion mirrors Volponi’s own frustrated aspirations for a profound reform of Italian industry, especially after the demise of the visionary industrialist Adriano Olivetti, who had hired Volponi and other intellectuals, including Ottiero Ottieri, in an attempt to humanise his industries. Volponi’s oeuvre reminds us that, in order to lead to a real improvement in the lives of workers, industry should provide not only economic stability for them and their families, and the fulfilment of their basic needs, but it should also address their intellectual development.¹⁵⁴

It can be argued that the malaise portrayed in *Memoriale* reaches its climax in *Le mosche del capitale*, since the latter novel fully discloses and denounces the effects of industrialisation on the city of Bovino and its inhabitants. *Le mosche del capitale* describes a city in which people live their lives confined either to their home or the workplace; a city that has come to coincide with Foucault’s space of security. The characters are scarcely portrayed while physically moving across the urban fabric and the action takes place almost exclusively indoors. Drawing once again on the spatial theories of Foucault, it may be said that the story told in *Le mosche del capitale* has echoes of the plague-stricken town described in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault shows how the plague

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 303.

¹⁵⁴ Emanuele Zinato, ‘Paolo Volponi: letteratura e industria’, <<http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/made-in/paolo-volponi-letteratura-e-industria>> [accessed 20 February 2018].

regulations and measures of containment that were implemented in sixteenth and seventeenth-century towns in the case of an epidemic outbreak, betray, more broadly, an ancestral fear of the contagion, intended as any potential element of chaos and disorder that disrupt the dominant social order and everyday life activities.¹⁵⁵ In a similar way, urban dwellers in *Le mosche del capitale* have somehow been contained and domesticated, and now appear docile and malleable. In this regard, the beginning of the novel is particularly emblematic, since, as was seen earlier, it captures the inhabitants of Bovino in a dreamless sleep that resembles lethargy. The exercise of power, argues Foucault, entails the control of conducts, that is actions, of individuals.¹⁵⁶ In this way, any potential threat to the capitalist order has been neutralised and the city of Bovino has turned into a disciplined, aseptic space. Interestingly, in this regard, in the novel people are objectified, while objects – a computer, a couch and the chairman’s bag – can speak and replace them.

Le mosche del capitale is peppered with references to the question of Fascist legacies in the consumerist society that has developed out of the post-war boom. The issue is raised, for example, by the character of Radames, a security guard at MFM (the fictional company inspired by Olivetti). In a speech replete with fascist and imperialist tropes, Radames calls for the necessity to infiltrate authoritarian elements into the Italian public administration, police, and judicial and school systems, in order to exert control and influence over democratic institutions (‘i bambocci deboli e incerti cosiddetti democratici al potere’)¹⁵⁷ and the mentality of Italians. In this way, ‘il popolo’ will once again become ‘ordinato e laborioso, serio, ubbidiente’,¹⁵⁸ as it used to be under the Fascist regime.

Dobbiamo cioè tendere a moltiplicarci, a fare entrare le nostre credenze e le nostre volontà in tutte le branche vitali dell’organizzazione nazionale, soprattutto in quelle dei pubblici poteri e della pubblica amministrazione... di tutti i bracci secolari dello stato, dalla magistratura all’esercito, dai carabinieri alla finanza... Magari fino alle scuole ai collegi ai centri alle

¹⁵⁵ ‘Behind the disciplinary mechanisms can be read the haunting memory of “contagions”, of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder.’ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by A. Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 198.

¹⁵⁶ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. xxii.

¹⁵⁷ Volponi, *Mosche*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

organizzazioni sportive. [...] potremo con grande forza e nuove capacità, davvero uniti, andare a conquistare e mettere ordine in altre regioni e in altri territori.¹⁵⁹

It was seen earlier that some of the discriminatory practices that are widespread under the Fascist regime continue to exist in the post-war Republic, particularly against left-wing political dissidents. Through Radames's speech, which indicates the hard-line approach that industry should take against 'ogni principio di opposizione di intralcio all'industria'¹⁶⁰ and particularly against 'tutti i nemici, di cui è pieno il mondo, anche le nostre case, le nostre città, soprattutto le nostre fabbriche',¹⁶¹ Volponi denounces the oppressiveness of post-war Italian political and industrial elites. Indeed, in those years, industrial management at Fiat and in other companies aligns with the repressive attitudes of post-war governments, for instance through the creation of anti-strike rewards and practices of discrimination towards members of the CGIL, Italy's largest union.¹⁶²

The same authoritarian and imperialist views expressed by Radames in his speech are reaffirmed through the image of the parade of industrialists in Bovino's central streets, which takes place toward the end of the novel. This is part of a strategy of intimidation, carried out by the industrial management in response to the unsuccessful strike organised by a group of workers, whose demonstration comes to a halt in front of the company headquarters, almost an unconquerable fortress. The industry chiefs, instead, march in a triumphant procession around the city, like an army ready to be deployed, thus reaffirming themselves as rulers.

I quarantamila passavano per il centro ben coperti e compatti nel grigio degli abiti e nel blu delle scarpe [...] Quarantamila capi silenziosi e disciplinati, ben pettinati e calzati.¹⁶³

In the novel, there is a strong perception of the authoritarian threat, which, as Dondi has pointed out, has scored the path of Italian post-war Republic and its constitutional

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² 'L'iniziativa delle direzioni aziendali – alla Fiat e altrove – si coniugava al quadro politico dei primi anni cinquanta che abbiamo già delineato: nelle fabbriche più che altrove si coglie il clima generale "degli anni della libertà congelata", gli anni in cui sull'eguaglianza prevale "la regola della discriminazione"' (Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, p 37).

¹⁶³ Volponi, *Mosche*, p. 262.

parties.¹⁶⁴ In *Memoriale*, too, we can detect the presence of ‘one time Fascists, now converted only to a degree’.¹⁶⁵ In the extract below, Albino’s line manager Grosset, mentions the factory engineer Pignotti, who has only pretended to repudiate his pro-fascist political stances until it was safe enough to express them again. According to Grosset, Pignotti would be willing to use violence on the least pretext, in order to maintain discipline among the factory workers.

‘Sì! C’è la guerra,’ disse subito Grosset quando gli riferii ogni cosa. ‘C’è proprio la guerra e Pignotti ci farebbe lavorare con le bastonate se appena potesse. A che punto siamo ricaduti in pochi anni. Il caro ingegner Pignotti subito dopo la liberazione sembrava il più mansueto degli agnelli [...]. Si vede che tutte le vecchie ambizioni lo hanno ripreso. Vuol comandare, vuol comandare a tutti i costi.’¹⁶⁶

Furthermore, the novel hints at the existence of different kinds of people who are trying to take advantage of the new situation created by the end of the war. For instance, this is the case of dottor Fioravanti and Signora Eufemia, who deceive Albino into expecting a miraculous cure from their serum treatments. On the contrary, as we have seen, the neurotic and naïve Albino is not able to navigate the complex phase of transition of the post-war years.

2.5 Conclusions

The chapter has offered a possible reading of Bianciardi’s *La vita agra* and Volponi’s *Memoriale* and *Le mosche del capitale*, in which the analysis of the representation of urban transformations in the novels draws on the spatial theories of power developed by Foucault and Lefebvre. Moreover, the texts have been presented as rooted in a specific socio-historic context, that is, the complex transition of the boom years in Italy, in which radical innovations in Italians’ values and lifestyles intertwine with the persistence of elements from the pre-war and Fascist past. In shaping a certain image of post-war urban

¹⁶⁴ Dondi, pp. 149-50.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 148.

¹⁶⁶ Volponi, *Memoriale*, p. 171.

transition in Italy, the texts examined in the chapter draw somewhat on traditional themes that, in the literary imagination, have been applied to the description of the modern metropolis, seen as a site of alienation, social inequality and moral corruption. In this sense, the novels describe a universal condition of non-belonging and existential estrangement, which pervades many literary and artistic representations of the city. It may be argued that, in the writings of Bianciardi and Volponi, the anxiety about the experience of urban modernity, results in a sort of dialectic dynamic of imaginative escape and actual residence in the city, since the latter ultimately provides the source of literary imagination. The same may be said about the characters portrayed in the novels, who, notwithstanding their conflictual relationship with the city, also find in the latter opportunities for encounters and professional development (even though these are negated by the nihilistic view that prevails in the end).

Metropolitan life is to some extent a liberating experience, which encourages more diluted modes of identification. Nevertheless, the rigidity of pre-existing structures and class divisions persists, in a negotiation between tradition and liberation. It is no doubt that, in post-war Italy, city life ensures more freedom and wider possibilities, especially to young people and women who could finally escape from the constrictions of their patriarchal and traditional societies, as in the case of those coming from the impoverished regions of the rural South.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, it may be said that the urban environment ultimately provides Bianciardi and Volponi with the material for their successful novels. In Grosseto, Bianciardi mainly writes preparatory works which lead up to the novels of the Milanese years and his success as a writer seems to be quite controversially tied to Milan. Volponi, born in rural Urbino in central Italy, moves to Piedmont to join enlightened industrialist Adriano Olivetti in his effort to reform Italian industry: Volponi works as an industrial manager for both Olivetti and Fiat, and draws on this experience for the writing of his industrial novels.¹⁶⁸ With their contradictions, Bianciardi and Volponi once again remind us of the figure of the modernist artist, who ‘feels at once aroused by the city and submerged and powerless in its vastness.’¹⁶⁹

The novels examined in this chapter present a critical view of the changes in size and social structure of Milan and Turin, which are depicted as having become sites of

¹⁶⁷ Ginsborg, p. 243.

¹⁶⁸ See for instance Manuela Pistilli, *Paolo Volponi: uno scrittore dirigente alla Olivetti di Ivrea* (Fano: Aras, 2014).

¹⁶⁹ Lehan, p. 273.

social inequality, anomie and authoritative power. More broadly, the novels represent a rejection of the industrial civilisation developed out of Italy's unprecedented economic growth in the post-war period. The result, in the texts, is a subjectivist withdrawal of the characters into protective and domestic microcosms, perceived as spaces detached from the official city, such as Brera for Luciano and the small bedroom facing the Lake Candia for Albino. Bianciardi expresses a conservative and somewhat elitist mode of resistance to modern urban life, by occupying the traditional spaces of cultural value that delineate Milan's intellectual milieu: the area of Brera/Braida is mostly frequented by artists and intellectuals, and comes to embody a space of resistance, in the context of the city's dominant ideology, based on efficiency and economic profit. In *Memoriale*, the main characters are representatives of the less powerful and marginalised, positioned at the far end of the power relations in the modern city and industry. The escape from modern urban life, however, proves illusory: Luciano is forced out of Brera to discover the 'real' city and live like its inhabitants; Albino lives in a perpetual state of inner conflict and love-hate relationship with the factory environment. The pervasiveness of the industrial city, which has become almost a state of mind, in *Le mosche del capitale*, confirms the impossibility of escaping the constraints of modern society, with its new forms of regulation and social control. The writers present the city as the paradigm of a model of civilisation and industrial development that has gone wrong. Moreover, they anticipate discourses on the dematerialisation of urban spaces and marketable reduction of the city that have informed contemporary debates in the field of urban studies.¹⁷⁰

Bianciardi and Volponi write in the midst of radical changes that are transforming Italy's sociocultural landscape and, at the same time, in years in which it becomes clear that some elements from the past have survived and infiltrated into post-war Italian society. Their novels are situated in this specific historical moment, which shapes their account of the urban-industrial society of Northern Italy. As Dondi has pointed out, after twenty years of Fascist dictatorship and two years of civil war during the Italian Resistance, the climate of the Cold War creates the impression that in Italy 'an authoritarian political solution was always on the cards'.¹⁷¹ Thus, it does not come as a

¹⁷⁰ Such reflections, already prefigured by Lefebvre through his analysis of the abstract space of late capitalism, reverberate, for instance, through Harvey's idea of space-time compression, Jameson's definition of postmodern culture and architecture as 'depthless', and the idea of simulacrum developed by Baudrillard.

¹⁷¹ Dondi, p. 149.

surprise that, in the novels under scrutiny, the ghost of totalitarianism lingers as an insidious threat, lying just beneath the level of consciousness. We have seen that the parallel with Fascism is sometimes established directly, through authoritative characters that retain a continuing nostalgia for the Fascist *Ventennio*, as well as through the war imagery that infuses all of the novels examined in the chapter. Moreover, the ghost of totalitarianism haunts the modern capitalist city, through industrial architecture and monumentality, which are a visual reminder of the authority of state power, and the hierarchical and repressive way in which urban spaces are organised, in order to enhance individualism, maximise industrial productivity and promote consumerist practices. As stated earlier, these descriptions of besieged urban spaces, in the novels, echo Lefebvre's idea of space colonisation, carried out by modern capitalism. Hence, it may be argued that the novels ultimately connect authoritarianism and economic capitalism, for the latter allies political and industrial elites, and relies on the repressive intervention of state power and police to maintain the dominant social order. What emerges from Bianciardi's and Volponi's literary representations of 1960s Milan and 1960s-1970s Turin, is an historical uncanny, in which the present is haunted by an unprocessed past, as will be discussed further in the next chapter.

In the context of a survived continuity with elements and institutions of the pre-war period, the writers' anti-urban stance denotes antagonism towards the economic system and society born out of the boom, which have betrayed the hopes of the reconstruction period. It is also worth mentioning that, in 1960, that is to say two years before Bianciardi and Volponi publish *La vita agra* and *Memoriale*, the transitional government led by Fernando Tambroni sparks protests and demonstrations, and reopens once again the issue of Fascist legacies in the Republic, never confronted or elaborated critically, by looking to form a tactical alliance with the far-right party MSI.¹⁷² Furthermore, as stated earlier, another reason for the anti-modern motifs that many writers of the boom years, including Bianciardi and Volponi, adopt in the context of a broader dismissal of Italy's totalitarian past, could be the fact that, especially in its early stages, Fascism presented itself as an urban movement, promoting the modernisation of Italian society and the expansion of consumerism. As Ben-Ghiat has noticed in relation to post-war Italian cinema and De Santis's *Riso amaro* (1949) in particular, 'the image of a pure

¹⁷² Paolo Pombeni, 'Christian Democracy in Power, 1946-63', in *Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics*, ed. by E. Jones and G. Pasquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 255-67 (p. 263).

“real” Italy countryside’ contrasts with ‘a false and corrupt Italy that embraces urban, bourgeois and cosmopolitan values’.¹⁷³ Ben-Ghiat goes on to argue that these kinds of representations support a narrative of victimisation, which is to say the need for Italians to externalise their responsibility, as if Fascism had been a foreign body that had disrupted the regular course of Italian history, a thesis that has been most notably advanced by Benedetto Croce. Thus, the post-war pacification process sees Italians united in a common endeavour to forget and heal the recent past and divisions, by rebuilding the country and its wretched economy. As Dondi has observed, in post-war Italian society, ‘forgetfulness and prosperity seemed to go together’.¹⁷⁴ This theme will be further explored in the following chapter, which focuses on the idea of the uncanny city as a site of re-emergence of the past.

¹⁷³ Ben-Ghiat, ‘Liberation’, p. 96.

¹⁷⁴ Dondi, p. 151.

3. Uncanny City: A Psychogeographical Exploration of Milan and Turin in the Crime Novels of Giorgio Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini

3.1 Introduction

The literature review section of Chapter 1 introduced the main theories that inform textual analysis in this chapter, explaining how they seek to challenge the conception of space as measurable and functional, which accompanied the invention of linear perspective and the rise of Mercantilism in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,¹ and was further engrained in Western thought with the Enlightenment.² The literature review also pointed out the relevance of the Freudian notion of the uncanny for the discussion carried out in this chapter, which looks at the Milan and Turin of the post-war years as ‘strange’ places, whose unfathomable aspects trigger the re-emergence of a collective unconscious. More specifically, the chapter explores the representation of Milan and Turin in a series of 1960s and 1970s crime novels, through the prism of the uncanny. Like the latter, crime literature entertains a special relationship with the modern city, for the simple fact that the density of population in large urban conglomerations is more likely to determine an increase in violent crimes. Textual analysis, in this chapter, reflects the complexity of the notion of the uncanny – as a feeling of unease that, as Freud has explained, arises from the double nature of the known and familiar, and an aesthetic of anxiety that cuts across artistic modes of expression –, drawing especially on Vidler’s study of the ways in which the uncanny reveals itself in architecture and urban space. Moreover, the meaning of the uncanny is historicised within the context of post-war Italian society, and overlaps with the feelings of anxiety stemming from the rapid process of modernisation that does not incorporate a critical reflection on the nation’s past. Italy’s troubled relationship with the past has also been a central theme in Chapter 2, where it was approached from the point

¹ Lefebvre argues that a new ‘spatial code’ emerged with the rise of the Renaissance town, the dissolution of the feudal system and the advent of merchant capitalism with its logic of accumulation. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 47.

² The Enlightenment, celebrating reason as the main source of authority, has also established the idea of the modern city as the rational organisation of men and functions of public life (Lehan, p. xv).

of view of Bianciardi and Volponi, writers who have detected the persistence of totalitarian elements in the urban industrial society of the boom.

Hence, while I draw on the studies that were presented in Chapter 1, arguing that the uncanny accompanies urban history and is almost inseparable from the experience of the city, I also aim to give a historical definition of it in relation to the Italian case: the extraordinary economic growth of the late 1950s and the subsequent, equally rapid crisis of the mid-1960s, when the economy goes stagnant. The official narrative of the boom period exalts the achieved prosperity, corroborated by the development of modern lifestyles and the diffusion of new leisure habits, overshadowing the persistence of elements from the past and, especially, the enduring peasant culture of the *Mezzogiorno*.³ As Minghelli has suggested, this ‘amnesiac culture of *benessere*’ betrays Italy's inability to develop a critical sense of history and tradition.⁴ Not only does post-war Italian society fail to elaborate the experiences of Fascism and the war, but also the more recent conflicts and violence of the early 1950s.⁵ The transition of the 1950s is therefore far more complex than the picture of widespread optimism suggests, and the tension that emerges between tradition and modernity, the new that irrupts into the habitual reality, does not offer a neat closure. Firstly, as was seen in the previous chapter, some of the pre-existing inequalities persist or are even exacerbated, for post-war productivity also relies on inconsistencies, such as the growing economic gap between the North and South of the country and the large reservoir of cheap labour force employed in the Northern industries.⁶ Secondly, as also stressed in Chapter 2, historians have identified continuity between the pre- and post-war Italian governments, with regard to the persistence of conservative tendencies and repressive practices.⁷ Furthermore, the ‘*riformismo mancato*’ of the post-war years, that is, the inability of the Italian State to encourage structural reforms in this crucial point of

³ Crainz discusses the example of the 1963 Vajont disaster, interpreting the unwillingness of Italian society to talk about it at the time, as partly due to the responsibilities of the Italian State in the tragedy, and partly to the fact that the disaster was a powerful reminder of the persistence of a poorer Italy. In an official report of 1964, cited by Crainz, the prefect of Belluno thus comments on the protests and demonstrations organised by the Vajont survivors: ‘I blocchi stradali effettuati i giorni 31 dicembre e 13,14 e 15 febbraio dai superstiti del Vajont hanno provocato vasto malumore, specie nel Cadore’. In his *Diario di un borghese*, still quoted by Crainz, Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli sarcastically observes: ‘Bello il blocco stradale dei superstiti del Vajont [...] avrà disturbato tanta gente bene che se ne andava a Cortina a festeggiare’ (*Paese mancato*, p. 7).

⁴ Minghelli, p. 386.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

⁶ Ginsborg, p. 214.

⁷ See for example Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, pp. vii-viii. As stressed in the previous chapters, the thesis of a continuity between pre- and post-war Italy is also supported by historians Paul Ginsborg, Mirco Dondi and Ruth Ben-Ghiat.

the nation's history, may account for widespread social dissatisfaction and the socio-political turmoil of the decades which followed.⁸

In this chapter, I focus specifically on Scerbanenco's Lamberti novels – *Venere privata* (1966), *Traditori di tutti* (1966), *I ragazzi del massacro* (1968), and *I milanesi ammazzano al sabato* (1969) – and Fruttero & Lucentini's Turinese novels, *La donna della domenica* (1972) and *A che punto è la notte* (1979). Urban descriptions are analysed, on the one hand, in relation to imaginings that were stirred up by accelerated urbanisation and, on the other, to the question of Italy's problematic relationship with the past. We have already seen in the previous chapter that in the short period of time in which post-war economic growth unfolds (as seen, traditionally dated 1958-1963), Milan and Turin grow in scale and complexity. Urban experience and imagination evolve alongside actual transformations in the physical and social landscape of the two cities. As main constituents, with Genoa, of the so-called Northern industrial triangle, Milan and Turin lead the way for Italy's economic development and are arguably reshaped more radically than other Italian cities by modernisation and the arrival of masses of newcomers from the impoverished areas of the country, attracted by the myth of economic progress.⁹

While Milan and Turin share these significant traits, they are of course different cities, not only in terms of urban features and identity, but also of types of crimes that are committed and criminals that operate within their territory. Milan is arguably the most cosmopolitan of Italian cities, which has filtered the innovations from Europe and has been at the centre of the main historical movements and events of twentieth-century Italy, constantly reinventing itself.¹⁰ Moreover, Milan is a city that has always taken pride in its hard-working mentality or, as Foot puts it, the 'American qualities of dynamism, profit and attraction'.¹¹ It is therefore no coincidence that Scerbanenco's novels draw heavily on the tradition of the American hard boiled, by depicting an urban environment in which the culture of personal gain has taken the upper hand over human compassion and solidarity, unleashing the extreme violence of 'metropolitan and modern banditry of the late 1960s'.¹² As we will see in greater detail later, in Scerbanenco's crime fiction,

⁸ Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, p. xiv.

⁹ With regard to Rome, Rhodes points out that the post-war period marks the acceleration of a process of urbanisation 'that had begun after Rome was made the capital of united Italy in 1870, continued up through the years of fascism, and then resumed with abandon in the 1950s and 1960s' (*Stupendous, Miserable City*, p. x).

¹⁰ Foot, p. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

criminals are common people, often belonging to the lower social classes, who are corrupted by the environment of the great city and kill for petty reasons. In this regard, Crovi speaks fittingly of the mythology of the murder ‘Milanese-style’.¹³

In comparison to Milan, Turin appears to be more closed and conservative. This does not come as a surprise, since the identity of Turin has largely been shaped by the presence of the Italian monarchy and, subsequently, the Italian flagship car manufacturer Fiat. Of course, the overall picture is more complex than this and, for instance, Lumley has pointed out that, in post-war Turin, urbanisation and industrialisation bring about a more cosmopolitan culture and willingness to innovate.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it may be argued that Turin’s more pronounced resistance to change, compared to Milan, reverberates into the sort of locked-room murder and criminal intrigues hatched within the upper classes, which may be found in Fruttero & Lucentini’s novels, particularly *La donna della domenica*. Thus, interestingly, in Scerbanenco’s and Fruttero & Lucentini’s crime fiction, Milan and Turin lend themselves to an analysis of the differences between the *noir* and *giallo*, two sub-genres of the crime fiction tradition. It has been pointed out, for instance, that the traditional *giallo* is more conventional in its displaying of the detective’s enquiry that leads up to the case solution, while the *noir* triggers a problematisation of established truths, by giving a complex representation of reality and by rejecting the happy ending, or final restoration of order.¹⁵ As Righini explains, the *giallo* may also be considered to be more ‘static’, in that ‘i protagonisti non si trovano quasi mai nelle condizioni di dovere “interpretare” scene di azione più o meno violenta’ and ‘lo spazio in cui la vicenda si svolge è di solito limitato nelle dimensioni e dotato di confini piuttosto rigidi’.¹⁶

Milan and Turin have, alongside Naples, been privileged locations for mystery stories, already in the early stages of the genre in Italy.¹⁷ Nevertheless, they have acquired greater strength and vividness only later and especially through the work of Scerbanenco

¹³ Crovi, p. 106.

¹⁴ Robert Lumley, ‘Turin after Arte Povera: A New City of Art?’, in *Italian Cityscapes*, ed. by Lumley and Foot, pp. 100-13 (p. 102).

¹⁵ Dieter Vermandere, Monica Jansen, and Inge Lanslots, ‘Introduzione’, in *Noir de Noir: un’indagine pluridisciplinare*, ed. by D. Vermandere, M. Jansen, and I. Lanslots (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 9-19 (p. 9).

¹⁶ Michele Righini, ‘Città degli incubi’, in *Luoghi della letteratura italiana*, ed. by G. M. Anselmi and G. Ruozi (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), pp. 142-152 (p. 143).

¹⁷ Giuliana Pieri has observed that ‘the very beginning of Italian crime fiction coincided with the representation of Milan, the city where, with a few exceptions, Augusto De Angelis’s Commissario De Vincenzi is based’. Giuliana Pieri, ‘Milano nera: Representing and Imagining Milan in Italian Noir and Crime Fiction’, *Romance Studies*, 25.2 (2007), 123-35 (p. 133).

and Fruttero & Lucentini, in which the urban setting becomes functional to the discourse on post-war urban transformations. As Righini comments,

Ciò che viene colto dagli autori italiani è un cambiamento che investe il vivere cittadino (prima di diffondersi anche in provincia) [...]. È il boom economico degli anni sessanta che rende le nostre città – e la mentalità di chi le abita – più simili a quello che genericamente viene definito il ‘modello americano’, e le configura come terreno fertile per la nascita di quella stessa tradizione poliziesca che abbiamo visto fiorire oltre oceano.¹⁸

In the Lamberti novels, Milan ceases to be a neutral backdrop to become ‘the habitat which engenders, nurtures and occasionally overmasters the criminals and their crimes’.¹⁹ Fruttero & Lucentini, on the other hand, have paved the way for the tradition of *gialli* that look at Turin as ‘la città più enigmatica, o meno nota d’Italia’ and ‘uno straordinario oggetto narrativo’.²⁰ The central role of the urban setting is just one of the new aspects introduced by Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini, and certainly an important one for the discussion carried out in this chapter. Fruttero & Lucentini’s novels are met with great acclaim from readers and critics alike, ‘providing a powerful blow to the distinction between “high-brow” and “low-brow” literature’,²¹ constitutive of the Italian literary tradition. Similarly, as Burns has pointed out, it is Scerbanenco’s non-conventionality (within Italy’s conservative literary establishment) and unorthodox training as a writer, his education only to compulsory level and former employment as an ambulance assistant and columnist for a women’s magazine, that give him a particularly lucid perspective on contemporary Italy.²² Covi has observed that, with the publication of *Venere privata*, ‘il giallo made in Italy subisce [...] un vero e proprio terremoto’.²³ In order to better contextualise the new aspects introduced by Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini, and

¹⁸ Righini, p. 145.

¹⁹ Burns, ‘Founding Fathers’, pp. 31-32.

²⁰ Covi, pp. 141-42.

²¹ Pezzotti, *Importance of Place*, p. 40.

²² ‘It is Scerbanenco’s intimate and immediate understanding of “ordinary” Italian society in his *gialli* set in Italy which makes them compelling, individual, and which allows the reader to witness the emergence of a branch of crime fiction which is rooted in contemporary Italian society and its moral and social functions and malfunctions’ (Burns, ‘Founding Fathers’, p. 27).

²³ Covi writes that, with the publication of *Venere privata*, ‘il giallo [...] cambia faccia e se ce lo permettete cambia persino colore, assumendo anche molte sfumature del nero. Comincia finalmente ad avere una connotazione più squisitamente nostrana e non sarà da allora più anonimo. Non è un caso che città come Milano, Roma, Napoli, Bologna, Torino, Palermo diventeranno da allora credibili scenari dei nuovi thriller italiani’ (p. 21).

the importance of the centrality that they assign to the urban setting, the following paragraphs trace a brief history of the Italian crime genre.

Although Italian writers have engaged with mystery stories from as early as the 1880s²⁴ and the two decades spanning the 1930s and 1940s have been seen as a ‘golden age’ of the genre in Italy,²⁵ the Italian tradition develops gradually and not without some difficulty, especially when compared to the evolution of the genre in countries such as Britain, France and the US.²⁶ Pistelli – who has carried out in-depth research on the prehistory of the Italian *giallo* and the work of proto-detective storywriters, such as Emilio De Marchi, Francesco Mastriani, Jarro (pseudonym of Giulio Piccini), Federico De Roberto, Remigio Zena, and Matilde Serao – has observed that the mid-nineteenth century sees the emergence of stories mixing elements of mystery, suspense and murder.²⁷ The first ‘collective attempt by Italian authors to produce Italian detective novels’²⁸ can be traced back to the 1930s, with the publication of a series of well-crafted stories, both in terms of style and innovative narrative techniques, by writers Alessandro Varaldo, Tito Antonio Spagnol, Augusto De Angelis, and Ezio D’Errico.²⁹ By the end of the decade, Scerbanenco too begins experimenting with crime writing, publishing a series of detective stories centred upon the character of Arthur Jelling.³⁰ Furthermore, in 1929, the popular Mondadori crime series titled *Libri Gialli*, begins publication. Thanks to its unprecedented success and longevity, the series goes on to exert a decisive influence on

²⁴ Some argue that 1883 could be considered the official birth date of the Italian *giallo*, for it is in this year that Cletto Arrighi publishes his novel *La Mano Nera*. Nevertheless, it is perhaps more accurate to indicate 1887 as birth date, for it witnesses the publication of *Il cappello del prete* by Emilio De Marchi, which contains many of the ingredients of the modern *giallo*. It is important to note, moreover, that there exist previous examples of texts that draw from the tradition of French feuilletons written by Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas and Eugène Sue, and which combine elements of the *noir* and gothic literatures. One of the first and most significant example is provided, in Italy, by Francesco Mastriani’s 1852 feuilleton *La cieca di Sorrento*. Maurizio Pistelli, *Un secolo in giallo: storia del poliziesco italiano, 1860-1960* (Rome: Donzelli, 2006), pp. 6-10, 20-25.

²⁵ The definition of golden age is used by Pistelli, who divides his history of the Italian crime fiction genre into prehistory (1860-1929) and *periodo d’oro* (1930-40). Jane Dunnett too observes that ‘the proliferation of crime fiction in Italy between the wars represented a publishing phenomenon of unprecedented scale’. Jane Dunnett, ‘The Emergence of a New Literary Genre in Interwar Italy’, in *Italian Crime Fiction*, ed. by Pieri, pp. 6-26 (p. 6).

²⁶ The genre of crime fiction ‘a partire dal 1841, data di edizione a Philadelphia di *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* di Edgar Allan Poe, si diffonde invece con rapidità in Francia, Inghilterra e Stati Uniti, conquistando in tali nazioni le più diverse fasce sociali e divenendo oggetto di ampie dissertazioni teoriche’ (Pistelli, p. 4).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

²⁸ Dunnett, p. 6.

²⁹ Pistelli, p. viii.

³⁰ Scerbanenco publishes five novels based on the character of Arthur Jelling, who works in the police archive in Boston: *Sei giorni di preavviso* (1940), *La bambola cieca* (1941), *Nessuno è colpevole* (1941), *L’antro dei filosofi* (1942), and *Il cane che parla* (1942).

the evolution of the genre in Italy.³¹ Evidence of this is also the fact that the term *giallo*, ‘a short-hand term for any type of detective fiction and more widely any story that has a mystery element’,³² comes exactly from the yellow cover of the Mondadori novels. Initially, these mainly consist of translations of British, French and American authors, but through the years, they increasingly attract Italian writers to the detective genre.³³ Following the 1941 shutdown of the Libri Gialli (together with all the other editorial initiatives in the field of crime fiction) on account of the Fascist regime, the new Giallo Mondadori series is launched after the war, in 1947, and goes on until 1996.³⁴

Within the Italian crime fiction tradition, the urban setting only acquires central significance in the post-war years. The controversial attitude of the Fascist government toward crime stories partly explains the delay in the emergence of a proper topographical tradition in Italy. Indeed, while at first the regime encourages the publication of home-grown *gialli*, in line with its politics of cultural protectionism,³⁵ it very soon grows more intolerant, due to the problematic and allegedly unpatriotic image of the country that the stories set in Italy convey. This censorial attitude culminates in the 1937 law promulgated by the Popular Culture Ministry, which establishes that no crime story published in Italy should feature an Italian murderer.³⁶ The intimidating climate leads Italian detective storywriters to choose exotic and stereotyped settings for their stories: locations of which the authors often have no first-hand knowledge, as in the case, for example, of Scerbanenco’s Jelling novels, set in an imaginary Boston.

It should have become clear now that Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini introduce an important element of novelty, by establishing the material setting of post-war Milan and Turin as the stage for crimes and investigations: not just as a background, but as the functional stage for their critical discourse on contemporary Italian society. Whilst Milan had already been the setting for a number of crime stories – most notably,

³¹ Luca Crovi itemises the most important book series dedicated to the genre of crime fiction, which are published in Italy between the 1910s and 1930s: ‘I Romanzi Polizieschi’, ‘Collezione di Avventure Poliziesche’, ‘Racconti d’Azione e di Mistero’, and ‘Collezione Gialla’. The Mondadori series exerts an enduring influence upon the Italian crime fiction tradition and, according to Crovi, triggers ‘una piccola rivoluzione all’interno del panorama letterario italiano’ (p. 43).

³² Pieri, ‘Introduction’, in *Italian Crime Fiction*, ed. by Pieri, p.1.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ A ministerial decree dated 30 August 1941 provides that the publication of *gialli* is subject to the authorisation of the regime (Crovi, p. 59).

³⁵ As from 1931, Italian publishers are required to have, in their catalogue, a percentage of Italian authors of at least 15 percent (Ibid., p. 44).

³⁶ ‘Nel 1937 il Ministero della Cultura Popolare dichiara che nei romanzi “l’assassino non deve assolutamente essere italiano e non può sfuggire in alcun modo alla giustizia” (Ibid., p. 52).

perhaps, Augusto De Angelis's Commissario De Vincenzi novels –, Scerbanenco shapes the identity of Milan as *noir* city able to compete with Boston and Chicago, metropolitan settings of the American hard boiled: a role that Milan has maintained in the Italian crime fiction tradition and collective imagination.³⁷ On the other hand, Fruttero & Lucentini have paved the way for a rich tradition of *gialli* set in Turin from the mid-1970s by authors such as Riccardo Marcato, Piero Novelli, Massimo Felisatti, Bruno Gambarotta and Margherita Oggero.³⁸ It is important to note that, from the 1970s, Italian crime stories have shown a general tendency to concentrate around metropolitan areas, therefore giving rise to specifically local traditions, such as the Scuola dei Duri in Milan, the Gruppo 13 in Bologna and the so-called Neonoir in Rome.³⁹ Further social changes in the 1990s and the new waves of immigration from the south of the world, which affect big and smaller urban centres, have lead the new generation of crime writers to turn their attention to other cities and territories. An example of this tendency is Sicily, the setting of the highly successful Inspector Montalbano novels, created by Andrea Camilleri.

Interestingly enough, the seeds for the development of a specifically Italian crime fiction tradition are sown in the time period under consideration in this dissertation. Indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s, and especially through the work of Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini, the Italian *noir* and *giallo* find their own voice, attaining recognition within Italy's cultural panorama.⁴⁰ Consequently, the 1960s signal a turning point in the debate about the specificity and legitimacy of the Italian crime genre. Until then, critics and detective storywriters had mainly considered Italian crime stories as escapist reading or mere imitation of the British and American classics.⁴¹ Moreover, the development of a proper Italian crime genre was deemed impossible, due to the absence, within the national territory, of big cities able to shape a metropolitan tradition.⁴² I propose that the

³⁷ Burns, 'Founding Fathers', p. 32.

³⁸ Covi, pp. 143-45.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

⁴⁰ Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction: An Historical Overview* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2014), pp. 52-53.

⁴¹ Covi identifies at least three key factors that explain why the 1960s signal a turning point in the fortunes of Italian crime fiction: the success of the popular tv series *Giallo Club*, broadcast by RAI from 1959 to 1961; the creation of *Diabolik* in 1962, which inspires similar comic-book characters and villains, including Kriminal, Satanik and Dylan Dog; and the publication of *Venere privata* by Giorgio Scerbanenco in 1966 (pp. 20-21).

⁴² Crainz mentions the debate between Augusto De Angelis and Alberto Savinio about the possibility of an Italian crime fiction tradition. In the 1930s, De Angelis endorses Italian crime stories, their originality and literary value, while Savinio argues that Italian culture is unable to develop a home-grown tradition of crime fiction. As he puts it, 'il giallo italiano è assurdo per ipotesi. Prima di tutto è un'imitazione e porta addosso tutte le pene di questa condizione infelicissima. Oltre a ciò manca al "giallo" italiano, "et pour cause", il

success of home-grown Italian *gialli* during the period under scrutiny is fostered by urban changes, given that crime fiction is largely a metropolitan genre that makes of the impossibility of mastering the city the trigger of its narrative.⁴³ In other words, it is not fortuitous that the Italian *giallo* develops during years of social upheaval and unprecedented urbanisation. This chapter shows that there is clearly interplay between Italy's post-war urban renewal and the crime stories of Giorgio Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini, who have been among the first writers to sear into consciousness internalised images and attributes of Milan and Turin, originating in the boom-years.

Like Bianciardi and Volponi, Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini engage, through the lens of crime fiction, with the inconsistencies of post-war modernisation. In what follows, I examine how these tensions reverberate in their crime stories. More specifically, in Section 3.2, the texts' thematic focus on the aspects of metropolitan life that seem to escape the understanding and control of individuals is linked to the underlying anxiety of the post-war period, which has been described as a feeling of disorientation due to rapid social change and the failure to integrate traumatic memories into the present context. In the course of the analysis in this chapter, it will become clear that crime fiction reveals a different, subterranean city, beneath the appearance of rationality and efficiency. Section 3.3 explores instead the link between urban growth and the development of crime in the examined texts, with a specific focus on the periphery, a traditional uncanny location in the imagination connected with the city.

3.2 Mysterious City

The modern city presents itself as the complex interconnection of the multiple aspects and layers that constitute urban life, including people, architecture and buildings, socio-

romanticismo criminalesco del giallo anglossasone. Le nostre città tutt'altro che tentacolari e rinettate dal sole non "fanno quadro" al giallo né può "fargli ambiente" la nostra brava borghesia. Dove sono i mostri della criminalità, dove i re del delitto?" (Ibid., p. 10).

⁴³ See Philip Howell, 'Crime and The City Solution: Crime Fiction, Urban Knowledge, and Radical Geography', *Antipode*, 30.4 (1998), 357-78. Howell argues that crime fiction portrays the city 'as a phenomenon that can be known only partially, from the vantage point of the street' (p. 367). Far from reflecting a (postmodern) idea of the city as labyrinth and maze, according to Howell, crime fiction fosters a truly shared knowledge of the city.

political relations and economic transactions.⁴⁴ Things that may be found in the city include monuments, institutional buildings and dwellings, which in turn may be taken as symbolic references to tradition, memory and power, as was seen in the previous chapter.⁴⁵ As was also pointed out in the literature review section of Chapter 1, while the modern capitalist city embodies the values of efficiency and rationality at the core of Western economy, it actually retains also a wild and uncontrollable side, which is intrinsic to urban history and the experience of the city, despite attempts to deny it.⁴⁶ The idea of mastering urban space by claiming a complete knowledge of it is, therefore, ultimately unrealistic. Albeit there is a tendency to think that crime literature asserts the power of reason, embodied by the detective who undertakes the enquiry to shed light on the mysteries of the city and, in so doing, maintain urban order, in fact modern crime fiction rejects the unitary perspective of the detective and distributes the meaning through a multiple narrative viewpoint that shapes an original account of the city.⁴⁷ As Howell puts it,

Crime fiction is in truth far less interested or successful in banishing anxieties about the city than is often supposed from a reduction of the genre to the detective or ‘mystery’ fiction [...]. The city’s mysteries are ongoing, never conclusively confronted, and victories always partial and often pyrrhic.⁴⁸

In other words, the postmodern *noir* tends to reverberate doubt, rather than re-establish the violated order, by replacing the final revelation of classic detective stories with a problematic ending that withholds any satisfying solution and opens to a variety of possible interpretations and outcomes.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Amin and Thrift have stressed the juxtaposition of several different elements that constitute urban space, in the context of their analysis of the forms of civic empowerment and participation disclosed by the city, as a site that encourages the development of grass-roots movements and social experiments. Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), pp. 154-55.

⁴⁵ Lefebvre claims that ‘a monumental work, like a musical one, does not have a “signified” (or “signifieds”); rather, it has a *horizon of meaning*: a specific or indefinite multiplicity of meanings, a shifting hierarchy in which now one, now another meaning comes momentarily to the fore, by means of – and for the sake of – a particular action’ (*Production of Space*, p. 222).

⁴⁶ Lehan, p. xv.

⁴⁷ Howell, p. 367.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

⁴⁹ Vermandere, Jansen, and Lanslots, pp. 9-10.

Similarly, the Lamberti novels seem to lack a universal sense of justice.⁵⁰ Let us take, for instance, the example of *Traditori di tutti*. In a break from his investigation of an international drug-smuggling network, Duca is spending an idle evening at home, solving crosswords and reading magazines. What he thinks about one of the headlines that he reads, is quite telling.

Su una rivista di attualità lesse il titolo *Le rivelazioni finali sul più grande traffico di droghe*, ma non lesse l'articolo perché lui non credeva alle rivelazioni finali, c'erano due buste di mescalina 6 in giro ed era stupido credere a qualsiasi rivelazione finale sulle droghe, che non finiranno mai.⁵¹

Not only does Duca question the possibility, suggested in the captivating title, of eradicating organised crime, but he also seems aware that all case solutions are temporary and disclose further mysteries and further solutions, in a potentially endless search for meaning. Duca never entirely masters Milan, and the fact that his slightly neurotic, inner thoughts are revealed to us through free indirect speech, may be read as a sign of this predicament. As Vidler has pointed out, the feeling of uncanniness is often activated by things beyond comprehension, which provoke bewilderment.⁵² The city, a reality of which we can only have fragmentary knowledge, has indeed been the privileged setting for uncanny experiences in modern literature and art. I argue that the Lamberti novels mirror the epistemological gap in our understanding of the city in three main ways: firstly, through their open, problematic ending, which, as will be explained later, I also link to the role of female characters in Scerbanenco's stories; secondly, by registering Milan's increasing violence; and, finally, through urban descriptions that emphasise those qualities of the built environment that elicit uncanny feelings. In what follows, I especially develop the latter point, which is arguably the most relevant in the context of this chapter.

The Lamberti novels generally end on a disquieting note. More precisely, they leave us with the uneasy feeling that widespread corruption and criminality in contemporary Milanese society are having tragic consequences on the life of honest people who do not partake in the new culture of violence. For order to be partially and momentarily restored, there is always someone who pays a high price. Tellingly, this is

⁵⁰ Burns, 'Founding Fathers', p. 34.

⁵¹ Giorgio Scerbanenco, *Traditori di tutti* (Milan: Garzanti, 1999), p. 186.

⁵² Vidler, p. 23.

usually a woman. In *Venere privata*, Livia Ussaro is disfigured by a gangster, while working undercover in Duca's investigation on a prostitution ring, while in *Traditori di tutti*, Susanna Paganica will likely face a life sentence for the murder of Turiddu Sompani and Adele Terrini, hardened criminals who have betrayed and killed her father during World War II.⁵³ The female characters, in Scerbanenco's crime fiction, are either presented as morally irreprehensible (as in the case of the young teacher Matilde Crescenzaghi in *Traditori di tutti*) and, as such, somehow more likely to become victims, or they embody a model of modern and emancipated femininity (Livia Ussaro) that is potentially dangerous and subversive in 1960s Italian society. This latter depiction of femininity as a disruptive force that challenges traditionally demarcated spaces, mirrors anxieties about a city that is becoming less controllable. Moreover, as Burns has pointed out, the fact that, in Scerbanenco's novels, women can easily be corrupted or find themselves in danger, is indicative of the 'fatal inconsistencies'⁵⁴ of the process of economic development in Italy, with its emphasis on individualism and the pursuit of economic gain. There is, moreover, a third case: that in which the perpetrator is a woman. For instance, in *I ragazzi del massacro*, both the victim and perpetrator are women, though of a very different kind: the young teacher Matilde Crescenzaghi embodies the values of integrity and human compassion, while her persecutor, Marisela Domenici, is an alcoholic and drug addict whose only pursuit is vindicating the death of her partner, for which she blames Matilde. Indeed, by raising concerns about one of her students, the young teacher has led unintentionally to the incrimination and temporary incarceration of Marisela and her partner, who dies shortly after. Marisela takes revenge by meticulously arranging the murder of Matilde at the hands of her own students.

The extreme violence that permeates the novels is a further indication of the difficulty of navigating the new Milan. We see, for instance, that those characters who are less able to benefit from the new opportunities offered by the modern city, are more likely to turn to crime or be lured into dangerous situations. There is another scene in *Traditori di tutti*, where Duca is once again reading the newspaper, this time in the company of his assistant Mascaranti. The front-page headlines and the local news in the

⁵³ In *I milanesi ammazzano al sabato*, the problematic ending involves a man, Amanzio Berzaghi, who becomes a murderer to avenge the death of his daughter at the hand of a group of criminals. Giorgio Scerbanenco, *I milanesi ammazzano al sabato* (Milan: Garzanti, 1999).

⁵⁴ Burns, 'Founding Fathers', p. 35.

inside pages, which report brutal crimes mostly involving vulnerable young people, trigger Duca's monologue about the reality of senseless violence in present-day Milan.

Non portiamo più coltelli, sciabole, e spade, e allora ammazziamo con quello che troviamo a portata di mano, – disse Duca –, quando siamo in auto prendiamo il cacciavite dal cassetto del cruscotto e sfondiamo il collo di quello che ci ha sorpassato a destra. A casa, invece, nel sano ambiente domestico, tra gli utili arnesi casalinghi, scegliamo forbici e con cinquanta sessanta colpi, finiamo l'amico che non ci ha restituito del denaro prestato.⁵⁵

Duca describes a corrupt society in which people kill for petty reasons or simply in a fit of temper, using whatever weapons are at hand: ordinary objects with a practical and banal use, such as a spanner or a pair of scissors. The fact that Scerbanenco's murderers are 'mostly greedy, stupid people who become irrational for squalid and trivial reasons',⁵⁶ reminds us that post-war rapid growth has deepened the discrepancy between the rich and poor, enhancing individualistic and competitive orientations. Indeed, as Ginsborg has pointed out, the boom 'lacked the dimension of collective responsibility', with the result of leaving behind the poorer and more vulnerable groups.⁵⁷ By neglecting the communitarian and public dimension of economic transformations, post-war modernisation ultimately reinforces Italian society's traditional emphasis on family and self-reliance.⁵⁸

Scerbanenco's enquiry on the violence of contemporary Milan also brings to mind the sociological studies of the metropolis cited in Chapter 1, exploring the pathological and alienating side of urban life. I am referring, more specifically, to the seminal work of Weber, Durkheim and Simmel, who have concentrated on the effects of urban life. Simmel, in particular, has focused on the impact of the overstimulation from the urban environment on the behaviour of city dwellers, whose blasé attitude is seen as the result

⁵⁵ Scerbanenco, *Traditori*, p. 118.

⁵⁶ Pezzotti, *Politics and Society*, p. 68.

⁵⁷ Ginsborg, p. 240.

⁵⁸ Giuliana Pieri has pointed out that 'the impact of industrialization, as Ginsborg has argued, emphasized and reinforced the individual or familial road to prosperity but ignored the collective and public dimension of the economic and social changes'. Giuliana Pieri, 'Crime and the City in the Detective Fiction of Giorgio Scerbanenco', in *Italian Cityscapes*, ed. by Lumley and Foot, pp. 144-55 (pp. 146-47).

of sensory overload, typical of big cities.⁵⁹ Indeed, city dwellers are bombarded with different kinds of information and stimuli (noise, movement, overcrowding) and, as a result, feel more alert and are more prone to exhaustion. Moreover, these early sociological studies of the city have pointed out the loosening of ties and atomisation of society, which characterises urban environments in which ‘human relations were secondary not primary, and a premium was put on utility and efficiency’.⁶⁰ The characters turned criminals in the Milan of Scerbanenco operate in a similar environment, dominated by a culture of economic gain and personal success, where spaces that are often empty, dark and deserted, reflect the moral isolation of the characters themselves.

Duca, in the monologue quoted above, goes on to compare Milan to Marseille, Chicago, and Paris, traditionally *noir* cities, therefore assigning to Milan the role of a capital of crime.

C’è qualcuno che non ha ancora capito che Milano è una grande città, non hanno ancora capito il cambio di dimensioni, qualcuno continua a parlare di Milano, come se finisse a Porta Venezia o come se la gente non facesse altro che mangiare panettoni, o pan meino. Se uno dice Marsiglia, Chicago, Parigi, quelle sì che sono metropoli, con tanti delinquenti dentro, ma Milano no, a qualche stupido non dà la sensazione della grande città, cercano ancora quello che chiamano il colore locale, la *brasera*, la *pesa*, e magari il *gamba de legn*. Si dimenticano che una città vicina ai due milioni di abitanti ha un tono internazionale, non locale, in una grande città come Milano, arrivano sporcaccioni da tutte le parti del mondo, e pazzi, e alcolizzati, drogati, o semplicemente disperati in cerca di soldi.⁶¹

Duca mentions the *pan meino* and *panettoni*, traditional Lombard recipes, together with other elements of the local color (*brasera*, *pesa*, and *gamba de legn*) to further emphasise the contrast between the past and the current situation of Milan as a great cosmopolitan city that attracts criminals and people of any kind, following the sprawling development of recent years.

⁵⁹ Simmel claims that ‘the psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli’ (pp. 409-10).

⁶⁰ Lehan, p. 7.

⁶¹ Scerbanenco, *Traditori*, pp. 118-19.

As has been suggested, Scerbanenco's descriptions of Milan emphasise the unsettling and disturbing aspects of metropolitan life. An example is provided by the meteorological observations, which are 'linked to the inhospitable and invisible quality of the city'.⁶² Fog, in particular, has been a trademark of Milan as industrial and bleak city in literary and cinematic representations, most notably Bianciardi's *La vita agra* (1962), Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1960), and Antonioni's *La Notte* (1961). In *I ragazzi del massacro*, Duca looks out of the office window to discover that the streets of Milan are covered in a blanket of fog. It is nearly dawn and he has spent the previous night at the police headquarters, interrogating the eleven students involved in the murder of their teacher, while, at home, his little niece is unwell and, shortly after, will die of complications from pneumonia. The break of the new day seems to suggest that hope is still possible, even in the most difficult of times. It is, however, just a feeble light that struggles to plough through the thick fog. Thus, it becomes clear that here the presence of fog emphasises the individual and moral isolation of the characters.

Guardando oltre la finestra, nella nebbia e nella notte, d'un tratto Duca vide che i due fanali più vicini si erano spenti, la nebbia, per un momento fu solo una nera macchia d'inchiostro, poi si accese di qualche cosa di chiaro e di rosa: era il nuovo giorno che cominciava, e di attimo in attimo la nebbia si accendeva di rosa.⁶³

Due to its flattening and deindividualising effect, fog can become a sort of accessory to the crime. In *I ragazzi del massacro*, for instance, it conceals and somehow protects Marisella Domenici when, 'in quella sera di nebbia densa',⁶⁴ she is able to break into the school where Matilde Crescenzaghi teaches evening classes for the disadvantaged young people of the area, and kill her. These qualities of the urban environment remind us that the city retains an uncontrollable side, which represent a menace to the enlightened ideal of society. In the course of urban history, this 'other' has taken many shapes, including the stranger or man of the crowd, spatial fears, and the homely that turns into its uncanny opposite.⁶⁵

⁶² Pieri, 'Milano nera', p. 137.

⁶³ Giorgio Scerbanenco, *I ragazzi del massacro* (Milan: Garzanti, 1999), p. 55.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁶⁵ Lehan, p. 6.

The frequent car journeys, in the Lamberti novels, are functional to root us in the Milan of the 1960s. To give an idea of Scerbanenco's topographical accuracy, in *Venere privata* Milan is mentioned 80 times; streets and squares 81 times, some of them more than once.⁶⁶ *Traditori di tutti* features a long car chase sequence, starting from Duca's flat in Via Imola 3, continuing across Milan's city centre and then outwards, towards the villages of the hinterland. We as readers are able to trace the itinerary as if on a map, thanks to the abundance of topographical details. While the attention to details of site and setting, such as street names and real public buildings, is the condition of verisimilitude to ground the shared knowledge of the city,⁶⁷ it is also true that, in the Lamberti novels, precise urban descriptions have a counterpart in the abstract darkness with which places are suffused. Milan is often portrayed at night, when familiar places appear strangely different and illegal actions take place more easily. In the extract below, Susanna Paganica has managed to get a lift into town from a passing car, after murdering Turiddu Sompani and Adele Terrini. She asks to be dropped off in a deserted service area in the periphery of Milan: from there, she intends to get a taxi to her hotel and then a second one to the airport, where she will board a flight bound to the US.

Era stato un passaggio pericoloso, ma anche qui non poteva farci niente, sola nello smisurato piazzale all'estrema periferia di Milano, nel dolce ma un po' freddo vento di fine aprile, ebbe paura.⁶⁸

The description, which reflects Susanna's subjective perception of the place – the qualities of emptiness and vastness, and the cool April wind that blows across the deserted square – exemplifies very well the idea of the uncanny as 'a representation of a mental state of projection',⁶⁹ rather than an inherent quality of space. Furthermore, it should be noted that marginal and forgotten places, like the service area of the extract, are more likely to become sites for the resurfacing of the 'underground and repressed life of the city',⁷⁰ for, in the public mind, they represent anonymous places associated with transitory existences. As Vidler has pointed out, 'space is assumed to hide, in its darkest recesses and forgotten margins all the objects of fear and phobia that have returned with

⁶⁶ Pezzotti, *Politics and Society*, p. 60.

⁶⁷ Howell, p. 366.

⁶⁸ Scerbanenco, *Traditori*, p. 15.

⁶⁹ Vidler, p. 11.

⁷⁰ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 36.

such insistency to haunt the imaginations'.⁷¹ Finally, it is interesting to note that the adjective *smisurato* and, elsewhere, the analogous *sterminato*, as well as the suffix *-one*, as in 'sterminati vialoni',⁷² all hint at the difficulty of assimilating Milan's new scaled spaces.

Another example of uncanny space dilatation is provided by the 'oscura vastità sahariana' of Piazza della Repubblica in *I milanesi ammazzano al sabato*. In the novel, Duca is on his way to meet Amanzio Berzaghi and tell him that his daughter, kidnapped by a criminal group, was found dead. Duca's gloomy thoughts are projected on to the passing urban landscape, framed by the car window, suggesting again that the uncanny can reflect a psychological state.

Le strade alle dieci e mezzo erano quasi deserte, l'Alfa percorse in tutta la sua lunghezza piazza della Repubblica, nella sua oscura vastità sahariana.⁷³

In *Venere privata*, the modern apartment blocks outlined against the rural landscape of Milan's hinterland, which resemble 'new isolated cathedrals in the desert',⁷⁴ are a further example of architectural uncanny.

Era l'unica costruzione fra tutti quei campi, una torre grigio celeste a dodici piani, gigantesca e avveniristica, così isolata, e che pure rammentava i monumentali templi aztechi che sorgono ogni tanto in selvaggi deserti.⁷⁵

In the above example, the mismatch between modernist architecture and rural environment, highlights the impact of the new geography of industrialisation, by conveying a sense of inconsistency and social disorientation.⁷⁶ This incongruity may also be explained through Lefebvre's idea that every spatial organisation carries within itself inherent contradictions, for it includes certain elements and excludes others: an example

⁷¹ Vidler, p. 167.

⁷² Giorgio Scerbanenco, *Il Cinquecentodelitti*, ed. by O. del Buono (Milan: Frassinelli, 1994), p. 266.

⁷³ Scerbanenco, *Milanesi*, pp. 37-38.

⁷⁴ Pieri, 'Milano nera', p. 142.

⁷⁵ Scerbanenco, *Venere privata* (Milan: Garzanti, 1999), p. 183.

⁷⁶ Burns, 'Founding Fathers', p. 33.

of the latter is the rural environment, which, in contemporary societies that are characterised by the receding of nature, is perceived as nostalgia.⁷⁷

The extract below from *Traditori di tutti*, describing a car chase, comprises many of the elements of the urban uncanny as ‘the slippage or mismatch between our expectations of the city [...] and the often surprising and unsettling experiences it can evoke within them’.⁷⁸ Interestingly, in the same extract, urban history makes one of its rare appearances in Scerbanenco’s novels, which generally represent a Milan ‘of the moment’.⁷⁹ The ancient buildings, however, are mainly a reconstruction for tourists and the ghosts from the past contribute to evoke a feeling of spatial estrangement.

E la cavalcata nella notte continuò, dopo piazza Cinque Giornate la Giulietta uscì dai bastioni, chi sa perché, e prese Viale Montenero, viale Sabotino, resi teatrali dall’ora notturna, dalla vuotaggine, dai lampeggianti gialli agli incroci, dall’ultimo trani aperto con l’insegna luminosa *Crota Piemunteisa* che tremolava, priva delle spente lettere *r u a*, e poi viale Bligny e viale Col di Lana, e insomma tutta la cerchia della semiantica Milano coi pezzi ancora residui e architettonicamente conservati o spesso ricostruiti, per i turisti, dei bastioni dai cui spalti, un tempo, pare, vigilavano prodi armigeri.⁸⁰

In the night time, the presence of blinking yellow traffic lights and a flashing neon sign that is missing a few letters, make the deserted streets seem oddly ‘theatrical’. The old quarter, restored for the benefit of tourists, is emblematic of the process of derealisation that urban space has undergone in contemporary society.⁸¹ This is especially evident in the urban cores, which have either become the domain of the rich that can afford luxury apartments or ‘a consumerist pleasure ground’ for tourists.⁸²

To recapitulate what has been said so far, the Lamberti novels represent an urban landscape of estrangement, made up of deserted streets, places that seem distorted in the darkness of the night and anonymous buildings. The uncanny urban descriptions reflect

⁷⁷ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, pp 51-53.

⁷⁸ Lucy Huskinson, ‘Introduction’, in *The Urban Uncanny: A Collection of Interdisciplinary Studies*, ed. by L. Huskinson (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-17 (p. 1).

⁷⁹ Burns, ‘Founding Fathers’, p. 33.

⁸⁰ Scerbanenco, *Traditori*, pp. 53-54.

⁸¹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 53.

⁸² Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City*, p. xvii.

Scerbanenco's view on the new Milan of the boom and hint, more broadly, at the shortcomings of the post-war development strategy, which, on the one hand, does not incorporate a critical examination of the past and, on the other, fails to take into adequate consideration the collective dimension of socio-economic changes. This view is further supported by the emphasis on the rise of mindless violence on the streets of Milan, which seems to be mostly affecting the urban poor and more vulnerable. It may therefore be argued that, in the Lamberti novels, the anxiety projected onto urban spaces betrays a broader difficulty, that of navigating the years of rapid transformations in which they were written, and a lack of direction in the confusing phase of transition.

Like Scerbanenco, Fruttero & Lucentini describe a city, Turin, which is difficult to penetrate. Turin's tendency toward secrecy⁸³ has inspired many contemporary crime writers, especially following the international success enjoyed by *La donna della domenica*. Turin is an emblematic and, in some respects, anomalous Italian city. It has been the seat of the Italian monarchy and the first capital of the country in 1861; in the course of the twentieth century, it has developed into a major industrial centre and the home of the Italian automotive industry, attracting immigrant workers from all over the country and especially from the South. Hence, like Milan, in the public mind, Turin is linked to values of work ethic and efficiency. Turin, however, has traditionally been considered also a mysterious place, associated with black and white magic.⁸⁴ As Pezzotti has commented, 'industrialization, immigration, and magic are an unusual mixture that may provide a fertile ground for detective fiction'.⁸⁵ In *La donna della domenica*, Turin's impenetrability is mirrored by the indirect ways of its inhabitants and, especially, of the upper classes, to which the book refers as 'l'ambiente', namely the milieu or inner circle. The specular relation and almost camouflage between the city, a fully-fledged character in the story, and the Turinese population recurs throughout the novel. Much like its aristocratic milieu, the city of Turin is conspiratorial and treacherous, while pretending to be sober and detached. It may be argued that, in *La donna della domenica*, the Turinese setting provides the condition for the plot to take specific turns and for the characters to act in certain ways. For instance, this is the case with the solution of the murder case at

⁸³ Crovi, p. 143.

⁸⁴ Pezzotti, *Importance of Place*, p. 40.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the end of the novel, which is somehow suggested by the city itself to the investigating hero, Inspector Santamaria.

L'idea venne al commissario la domenica mattina [...]. A dargli un aiuto nel suo solito modo negativo e circolatorio fu forse la città, spopolata e sprangata come in attesa dei barbari.⁸⁶

Santamaria possesses the right blend of confidence, diplomacy and personal charm to feel perfectly at ease in the company of Turin's high society. A Sicilian immigrant, Santamaria has fought in Piedmont in the Resistance: he is therefore both an insider and outsider (as a police officer and non-aristocrat) with 'a particularly lucid perspective' on Turinese society.⁸⁷ This is the reason why his superiors appoint him to investigate the murder case of architect Garrone, an unusual individual who is somehow attached to Turin's *beau monde*.

In realtà, i suoi superiori non avevano idea di cosa fosse quell' 'ambiente' di cui gli attribuivano una così profonda conoscenza. Sapevano – oscuramente – che la differenza tra chi contava e chi no, a Torino, era molto più difficile da stabilire che a Roma o a Napoli o a Milano. Ma in pratica, la sola conclusione che ne traevano era che bisognava stare molto più attenti, moltiplicare le cautele, i riguardi, e al bisogno – per quanto a denti stretti – gli inchini: perché, a Torino, 'non si poteva mai dire'.⁸⁸

Santamaria's superiors share the idea that the relations between Turin's social strata are regulated by a specific code of conduct, which seemingly does not apply to any other Italian city, and that therefore, in Turin, it takes extra precaution and diplomacy to navigate the pitfalls of public city-life.

Massimo Campi is, at first, one of the primary suspects in the murder investigation, alongside his friend Anna Carla Dosio, a lady from Turin's high society who entertains a brief sentimental relationship with Santamaria. The figure of Massimo Campi perfectly exemplifies the analogy between the spirit of the city and the lifestyle of

⁸⁶ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Donna*, p. 429.

⁸⁷ Franco Manai, 'La donna della domenica and the Italian Detective Novel of the 1970s', in *Differences, Deceits and Desires: Murder and Mayhem in Italian Crime Fiction*, ed. by M. Cicioni and N. Di Ciolla (Newark: The University of Delaware Press, 2008), pp. 83-98 (p. 91).

⁸⁸ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Donna*, p. 66.

the upper classes. A young dandy who belongs to one of the most influential families of the city's aristocratic milieu, Massimo believes that Turin is a dangerously masked city, which seems sober and detached, but is actually 'pronta a captare il Male da ogni angolo della terra, e la sua funzione è di spargerlo in giro per il resto della penisola'.⁸⁹ According to him, Turin is to blame for having spread a number of 'plagues' to the rest of the country. These are specific historic events or ephemeral trends that have originated in Turin, such as Italian unification, the first automobile, the first unions, the movies, left-wing intellectuals and sociologists.⁹⁰ Similarly, Massimo appears friendly and approachable, but is actually a conservative, as it transpires from his aristocratic manners and sophisticated tastes. Santamaria cannot help but observe, however, that Massimo's snobbish aura has its appeal, as does the aura of the city. In other words, he believes that, to the attentive observer, both the city and its dwellers reveal an unexpectedly charming side: 'lo *charme* d'impossibile definizione che stava sotto la crosta scontrosa della città, e che ogni tanto emergeva, irresistibile perché inaspettato.'⁹¹ Is it interesting to note the use of a foreign term to capture this idea, which suggests an inherent quality of strangeness and unfamiliarity to the city.

La donna della domenica documents an urban landscape that is under development and in which diverse socio-geographical spaces have come to interact, as a consequence of industrialisation and internal migrations. Turin is captured in a time of transition, in which boundaries within the city are being renegotiated. Urban transformations are particularly evident in the areas of intensive apartment buildings for the lower-middle-classes, such as the Santa Rita quarter, where the character of Oreste Regis lives. Regis works as a civil servant and has been the accomplice in Garrone's plan to blackmail Signora Tabusso, as will be explained in more detail later. In the novel, Regis is described as one of the countless men 'nati senza avvenire, per far numero, per figurare in statistiche di epidemie influenzali, di consumi, di trascurabili oscillazioni elettorali'.⁹² He is a petty bourgeois clerk and lives in a neighbourhood that mirrors the monotony of his existence, in the uniformity of the modern apartment blocks set down in a rigid grid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 290.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 167.

⁹² Ibid., p. 458.

The specularities that, once again, we detect in Turin's urban environment, resemble 'the uncanny effects of all mirroring'.⁹³

Pretending to be the spokesman of a local group for the protection of urban green spaces and with the actual intent of interrogating him so as to elicit a confession, Santamaria meets Regis in the Santa Rita apartment. Regis is only waiting to complain about the recent construction frenzy that, in his view, has undermined the liveability of the neighbourhood. He claims that

Qui, comunque, siamo arrivati al punto di rottura, non è più ammissibile che questi mostruosi casermoni soffochino ogni possibilità di una vita sana, bella, armoniosa! Lei ha visto: questa non è più una via, è un tunnel, è un cunicolo.⁹⁴

The image of the anthropomorphised apartment blocks evokes a modernist uncanny. The monstrous barracks convey a sense of claustrophobia and suffocation, as they loom over what appears to be not a street anymore, but a tunnel and a straight line. Likewise, in the following extract, the emphasis on geometrical architecture (implacable rows of buildings, minuscule trapezoidal terrace), suggests that all the available space has been densely built out. Crucially, it also suggests shapes inimical and unaccommodating to the human form.

[Regis] si sbracciava in ogni direzione, estendendo l'anatema a tutto il quartiere, di cui s'intravedevano all'ingiro i blocchi scaglionati in file implacabili. Sporgendo la testa, il commissario scorse sulla sinistra, così vicino che quasi lo poteva toccare, un minuscolo terrazzo trapezoidale messo di sglimbescio in una rientranza della facciata: sopra ci stavano a stento una sedia pieghevole e un tavolino di giunco.⁹⁵

The passage describes a rational plan to shape the use of space, which responds to the needs of the booming industrial city and is somewhat reminiscent of the issue of spatial control that has been explored in the previous chapter. More importantly, moreover, the passage links us to the problem of the repressed past. Indeed, twentieth-century

⁹³ Vidler, p. 221.

⁹⁴ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Donna*, p. 457.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

architecture celebrates functionality, by embracing modern values of mobility and industrial efficiency that break with tradition. In this way, it may be argued, modern architects also seek to contain the archetypical struggle between order and disorder that has shaped the experience of the city since the ancient times.⁹⁶ Broadly speaking, however, one of the outcomes of architectural projects that reject the past to create the new, is the ‘haunting absence’⁹⁷ of the traditional city, which continues to live in the urban unconscious and is regarded with regret as the authentic city. In this regard, Vidler speaks of the ‘presence of absence’.⁹⁸

Moving on to Fruttero & Lucentini’s description of Turin’s old center in *La donna della domenica*, it is interesting to note how this apparently celebrates the benign aura of authenticity of the oldest part of the city, but actually contains, once again, key references to elements of disorder. Massimo’s walk in the old centre ultimately reveals unexpected insights into the transformations of the ancient centre. Following from the comment above, moreover, what Massimo sees appears once again messily human in form.

Massimo s’inoltrò nelle fungose, sepolcrali viuzze della città vecchia [...]. Se ne andò, tutto felice, fra le ghiotte bottegucce dove non aveva messo mai piede: mercerie, copisterie, pelletterie, pollerie, salumerie, e altre cavità più indecifrabili. Da ogni androne, da ogni decrepito cortile, uscivano ventate di muffa, cani, bambini, clangori e martellamenti di artigiani ricercatissimi e in cronico ritardo sulle consegne. Tutto gli si ricostruiva soavemente intorno: droghieri in camice grigio, garzoni in grembiule bianco arrotolato alla vita, donnone con la sporta, suore bisbiglianti, striminzite beghine, pensionati col mezzo sigaro, mamme che gridavano dagli ammezzati. A ogni cantonata sostava una prostituta grassa. Non era ‘proletariato’, questo, era ancora ‘popolino’, e Massimo, crogiolandosi nel suo sdoppiamento, vi si aggirava come in una festa in costume una volta tanto riuscita, insensibile ai *fumi d’auto e motociclette*, ai *juke-box* e ai *dialetti meridionali* che (il maestro di cerimonia non poteva aver pensato proprio a tutto!) sgorbiavano ogni tanto la composizione.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Lehan, p. 98.

⁹⁷ Vidler, pp. 182-83.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 182.

⁹⁹ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Donna*, p. 228 (my emphasis).

To Massimo, this pre-industrial scene looks like a costume ball staging the traditional figures of the ‘populace’: artisans, grocers, women yelling at their children from balconies, prostitutes waiting for customers. On closer view, however, every appearance of authenticity turns out to be a simulacrum, in a sort of slippage between reality and dream, as the old centre is changing as rapidly as the rest of the city. This is confirmed by the references to new lifestyles and ways of mobility (the fumes from cars and motorcycles), cultural and leisure habits (the jukeboxes), and by the jarring presence of Southern immigrants. Immediately afterwards, Massimo blames himself for having indulged in regret for the old days and in the sentimental celebration of an urban order that has probably never existed.¹⁰⁰

In the above passage, the act of walking offers the occasion to see beyond superficial appearances, very much like the process of detecting. We may take this argument further and track an analogy between the structural features of crime fiction and methods of psychogeographical enquiry, which rely heavily on walking. To begin with, they share the same object of analysis, which is to say a city in which familiar spaces have become mysterious and threatening, in the wake of modernisation and industrialisation. The term psychogeography, which originated with the Situationist movement of Guy Debord in 1950s Paris, encompasses a set of theories and practices, aimed at promoting a subjective and playful experience of the city.¹⁰¹ The Situationists encourage the creative remapping of urban space, to be pursued mainly through aimless drifting (the practice of the *dérive*) and automatic writing, in the lines of the Surrealist tradition. They play on the double nature of the known and familiar to reveal the spirit of the city under the crust of everyday life.¹⁰² The communal search for alternative ways of apprehending and representing urban reality, explains why the act of walking features prominently in both psychogeographical practises and detective stories. Benjamin observes that, on occasions, the figures of the flâneur and detective overlap, since both of them record observations of urban scenes and grasp traces and hints disseminated across the urban fabric, while walking the city streets.¹⁰³ To put it in Benjamin’s words, ‘in the flâneur, the joy of

¹⁰⁰ [Massimo] stesso, mentre rimproverava agli altri la loro cecità, ecco che stava scivolando chiotto chiotto, come in una casa equivoca, nel rimpianto dei bei tempi andati, nella nostalgia dell’immobilità, nella celebrazione sentimentale di un ordine, di uno stile, mai, probabilmente, esistiti davvero’ (Ibid., p. 228).

¹⁰¹ Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2010), p. 10.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰³ Benjamin, p. 72.

watching prevails over all. [...] the result is the amateur detective'.¹⁰⁴ Within the tradition of psychogeography, walking is regarded as an activity that may disclose unexpected insights, by challenging official itineraries and traditional ways of getting around in the city. As Coverley puts it,

In cities that are increasingly hostile to the pedestrian, [walking] inevitably becomes an act of subversion. Walking is seen as contrary to the spirit of the modern city with its promotion of swift circulation and the street-level gaze that walking requires allows one to challenge the official representation of the city by cutting across established routes and exploring those marginal and forgotten areas often overlooked by the city's inhabitants.¹⁰⁵

Coverley's definition brings to mind the episode discussed in the previous chapter, of Luciano being stopped by the police, due to his suspicious attitude of walking with no apparent purpose through the streets of Milan, instead of joining the flow of people hurrying past each other to reach their workplace. Clearly, in *La vita agra* too, walking is regarded as a political and potentially subversive act.

A further analogy with the Milan of Bianciardi may be found in the roadworks that, also in the case of Turin in *La donna della domenica*, signal the relentless urban restructuring of those years.

La città usciva dal fango, dalla pioggia, dall'estenuante e sudicia costrizione di un inverno che si trascinava fino a giugno, per coprirsi subito di una spinosità ancora più faticosa di lavori in corso. Irta, scostante di nuovo. E in quell'assordante, ubiqua frenesia di restauri, ogni velleità di meridionale abbandono era stroncata sul nascere.¹⁰⁶

The maintenance works, with their corollary of acoustic pollution and dust clouds, burden the characters of Fruttero & Lucentini with a sense of oppression and almost physical fatigue. This seems to apply particularly to those who have grown up elsewhere and, only later, have moved to Turin, like Santamaria and some of his police colleagues, who are

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁰⁵ Coverley, p. 12.

¹⁰⁶ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Donna*, pp. 56-57 (my emphasis).

also from the South. By highlighting the sense of physical and mental effort, caused by the seemingly ever-present roadworks, Fruttero & Lucentini hint once again at the loss of control over the rapidly changing industrial city.

In *La donna della domenica*, the issue of urban development is so relevant that Turin's changes may even be seen as one of the motives behind the murder case of the architect Garrone, which is at the core of the story.¹⁰⁷ Having learnt about Signora Tabusso's plan to turn her lawn into building plots and being aware of a building restriction that could block her application, Garrone starts to blackmail her, asking her to choose the project that he has presented over the official one, drawn up by a distinguished architectural firm. Signora Tabusso, who, interestingly, is described as 'vecchia torinese con l'acqua alla gola, sopraffatta da nuove genti, nuovi costumi, nuove leggi, nuovi vizi',¹⁰⁸ convinces herself that the only solution to her situation is to kill Garrone. We can see that, as in the Lamberti novels, those people who are less able to benefit from the new reality brought about by social and economic changes, are more likely to find themselves in dangerous situations. Moreover, as Manai has observed, the trajectory of Signora Tabusso in the novel, exemplifies the struggle between old and new money.¹⁰⁹ In other words, the tension between the aristocratic and middle-class values that represent, respectively, Turin's past and present.

As stated earlier, modern crime fiction creates an alternative approach to the traditional knowledge of the city, based on the shared perspective of the characters.¹¹⁰ In *La donna della domenica*, this approach results in a dynamic sketch of Turin's evolving social geography, created through the collective knowledge of characters who are representatives of different social groups, even though their description is filtered through Fruttero & Lucentini's marked degree of irony. Similarly, *A che punto è la notte* is a polyphonic novel involving a cast of characters who hold different functions and inhabit specific areas within the city. It still features Inspector Santamaria as detective, this time dealing with the assassination of Don Alfonso Pezza, the unusual priest of the church of

¹⁰⁷ Righini, too, has observed that, in *La donna della domenica*, 'la trama gialla viene messa in moto proprio da un episodio legato all'ingigantirsi dello spazio urbano – siamo a Torino – a discapito della campagna. Il desiderio della signora Tabusso di lottizzare il proprio appezzamento collinare per rivenderlo come terreno edificabile la spinge all'omicidio di due persone [...]. Allo stesso tempo, ponendola in relazione con lo scatenarsi della violenza omicida, i due autori sottolineano la negatività di questa speculazione urbanistica' (p. 147).

¹⁰⁸ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Donna*, p. 502.

¹⁰⁹ Manai, p. 93.

¹¹⁰ Howell, p. 358.

Santa Liberata. Don Pezza is surrounded by a group of equally peculiar individuals, such as engineer Vicini and retired Fiat worker Priotti. Don Pezza's murder triggers a series of events that connect even more characters together, including Monguzzi and Rossignolo (who work in a publishing house and are arguably based on Fruttero and Lucentini), Thea Guidi and her mother, who belong to a wealthy Turinese family, and the Mafia associate Graziano Scalisi.

Fruttero & Lucentini's second Turinese novel, *A che punto è la notte* was published in 1979, a period of economic recession and socio-political turmoil for Italian society, which may account for the crepuscular atmosphere of the story, alluded to in the title itself.¹¹¹ The novel registers a moment of crisis and disorientation, to which, arguably, the recurrent theme of corrupted Babylon refers. In *A che punto è la notte*, Turin's increasing autoreferentiality reflects the further transformations that the city and, more broadly, Italy, undergo in the 1970s, when economic growth comes to a standstill and a new phase of de-industrialisation begins. The new phase is captured in *A che punto è la notte*, as well as in Volponi's *Le mosche del capitale*, which, as was discussed in the previous chapter, also focuses on 1970s Turin. Volponi's allegorical narrative modes signal a shift towards the later stage of capitalism and a postmodern urban sensitivity. Interestingly enough, both *A che punto è la notte* and *Le mosche del capitale* represent the city of Turin as increasingly polycentric and rarefied.

In *A che punto è la notte*, Fruttero & Lucentini's focus shifts significantly towards suburban Turin and, more specifically, the municipalities of the urban belt. The novel is literally framed by Turin's modern peripheries: it begins with the description of the Brussone housing project, developed in the hinterland during the 1960s, while the final police chase takes place in a discharged industrial area awaiting redevelopment. The emphasis on the precariousness of the housing projects and urban interventions that were carried out only a decade before, and therefore on the sense of incompleteness and decay ('scalcinato moderno'),¹¹² bears witness to Turin's abrupt development in the aftermath of the boom. As Lobsinger has observed, the spread of a 'burgeoning periphery' was the result of the rapid rise in population, due to the arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants that put pressure on Turin's infrastructures.¹¹³ In the novel, Graziano's and

¹¹¹ The title refers to an obscure oracle from the Bible, Isaiah 21:11.

¹¹² Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, *A che punto è la notte* (Milan: Mondadori, 1987), p. 352.

¹¹³ Mary Louise Lobsinger, 'Architectural Utopias and *La Nuova Dimensione*: Turin in the 1960s', in *Italian Cityscapes*, ed. by Lumley and Foot, pp. 77-89 (p. 79).

Thea's car journey is the pretext for the authors to take the reader on a tour across the ghostly eeriness of the urban belt, where neon-lit furniture workshops, shabby motels, and night clubs, remind us that 'the uncanny erupts in empty parking lots around abandoned or run-down shopping malls [...] in the wasted margins and surface appearances of postindustrial culture.'¹¹⁴ Moreover, the emphasis put on the impersonality of buildings and places hints at the fact that post-war rapid economic growth has sacrificed Turin's distinctive local features.

La Porsche correva tra gli innumerevoli misteri della periferia. Alti edifici nudi, resi più simili gli uni agli altri da differenze irrisorie, bordavano lunghi viali senza fine, ormai identici in tutte le città del mondo. [...] una vittoria dell'anonimo, del piatto e uniforme plurale.¹¹⁵

The above passage hints at the levelling effect of rapid urban growth, by suggesting that all modern developments in the suburbs look the same and that, by extension, this applies to many other cities in an increasingly globalised world. As seen in the previous chapter, the abstract space of the expanding world capitalist economy tends, indeed, to homogenise differences.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, as has been stated several times, the aspects that ought to be excluded from the dominant spatial organisation resurface in the form of the repressed. The result, in the above passage, is again an architectural uncanny: in their replicability, the anonymous buildings embody the figure of the double with its uncanny effect of disorientation.

In *A che punto è la notte*, Fruttero & Lucentini describe the post-industrial landscape of suburban Turin as a horizontal palimpsest of industrial layers: a chaotic juxtaposition of architectural features from different epochs, which ultimately tells us very little about the city's past.

Tra i compatti spicchi delle abitazioni cominciavano ad apparire basse cancellate e tetti aguzzi di fabbriche e manifatture, e ogni tanto un rettangolo d'erba marrone nel quale becchettava il collo smisurato e schematico di una gru. La città si dilatava, ricoprendo i vecchi confini coi paesi della cintura, e ciò che restava era una specie di archeologia

¹¹⁴ Vidler, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Notte*, p. 100.

¹¹⁶ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 49.

orizzontale, gli strati uno accanto all'altro, ben riconoscibili, la diroccata cascina barocca, poi la stazione Esso, poi la ciminiera ottocentesca, poi la casa operaia dei primi del secolo, poi la villetta 1920 col giardino e i pesci rossi, poi di nuovo una cascina, una stazione Chevron, un casello daziario abbandonato, e così via in cerchi sempre più ampi.¹¹⁷

Turin's periphery appears unevenly lined with traces of the previous industrial endeavours of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the above passage, the almost complete absence of vegetation, a few faded blades of bleached grass being all that remains of the countryside, emphasise the negative impact of rapid urbanisation, also confirmed by the gendered element of the language ('la città si dilatava'), which denounces the anxiety about unregulated urban sprawl. As with the examples from the Lamberti novels that were discussed above, this gendered element suggests a phallogentric conception of the uncontrollable spaces of the city.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the passage is reminiscent of Scerbanenco's synchronic portrait of a Milan devoid of historical depth. Fruttero & Lucentini's industrial vestiges convey, indeed, a feeling of impermanency, which triggers no real descent into the city's past. Both Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini's examples may therefore be read in relation to Italy's complicated relationship with past and tradition, and, particularly, in relation to a model of economic development that failed to adequately preserve the rural environment and cultural patrimony.

In this section of the chapter, textual analysis has centred on the idea that, by going beyond superficial appearances to reveal the mysterious and unfathomable aspects of the city, the texts under scrutiny also reveal the dark side of the period of time in which they were written, with its complexity and uncertainties. Moreover, the textual examples that have been provided from Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini's novels contain references to Italy's unresolved relationship with its past, and the idea that this failure has perpetuated some of the already existing contradictions within Italian society. Scerbanenco portrays a Milan of the present, almost completely devoid of references to the past, while *La donna della domenica* describes the conflict between old and new

¹¹⁷ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Notte*, p. 101.

¹¹⁸ According to Lefebvre, the abstract space of neo-capitalist societies has three 'formants': geometric, optical and phallic. The latter acts as the visual reminder of the (masculine) violence of state power (*Production of Space*, pp. 285-87).

Turin, perfectly embodied by the figure of Signora Tabusso. Finally, in *A che punto è la notte*, the unprocessed past resurfaces in the bleak suburban setting, where traditional urban features have grown fainter and it is easy to feel disoriented and get lost. In what follows, I look again at the work of Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini to discuss the link between urban growth and development of crime in the period of time analysed.

3.3 Dangerous City

As the city expands and becomes more complex, it also becomes less controllable. To put it in other words, urbanisation and domestic immigration bring about the fear of criminal penetration. The correlation between crime rates and city size has been the focus of a number of sociological studies.¹¹⁹ Glaeser and Sacerdote have identified three main peculiarities of the big city that may explain why crime rates are higher in dense urban areas: greater access to economic resources and therefore higher pecuniary returns, lower probability of arrest, and the presence of a higher number of crime-prone individuals.¹²⁰ Italian cities are no exception and the increase of violent crimes in the post-war period provides material for detective storywriters. The novels of Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini show that crime follows the geography of industrialisation by proliferating in the newly urbanised areas of Milan and Turin and by taking advantage of the improved road and motorway networks in the aftermath of the boom. As Milan and Turin stretch out, absorbing the adjacent settlements, they provide more discreet zones for illegal activities to develop. At the same time, since modern industrial centres have acquired an international dimension, criminal groups increasingly expand into new markets, beyond the municipal borders and on a supranational scale.

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to a more detailed discussion of the geographies of crime in the novels of Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini. Specifically, I intend to examine how the novels under scrutiny document the effect of urban development on the evolution of criminality, not only in terms of how, concretely, the latter mirrors the growth of the city, but also at a deeper level of interpretation. Indeed,

¹¹⁹ Edward L. Glaeser and Bruce Sacerdote, 'Why Is There More Crime in Cities', *The Journal of Political Economy*, 107.6 (1999), 225-58 (p. 226).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

on the one hand, in the examined texts, criminal organisations show the efficiency of modern industry and resemble the functioning of international capitalism (as does the urban system in which they operate), and, on the other, criminal acts are often engendered by the frustrated aspirations of the characters, who are not able to succeed in the competitive environment of the big city. Indeed, as we have already seen, those people who are not able to benefit from the new opportunities offered by the modern city are more likely to turn to crime and be lured into illegal rackets. As Foot has observed, this is particularly evident in the case of ‘those who arrived in the cities during the boom in search of work – for whom *exclusion*, not integration, was often the dominant experience.’¹²¹

3.3.1 Urbanisation and Crime

When, in *Venere privata*, Alberta Radelli is found dead in Metanopoli with her wrists cut to disguise the murder as suicide, Duca observes that ‘oggi ci si svena nei nuovi centri del petrolio, dell’industria pesante, schiavi in fondo, anche in questo ultimo atto di volontà, della spietata marcia verso il futuro’.¹²² Metanopoli was created by Enrico Mattei, founder of the Eni multinational oil company, in San Donato Milanese, in the suburbs of Milan, between 1955 and 1960, as a complex of offices, factory buildings, and blocks of flats for factory workers, which was to represent an ideal model of modern industrial town, providing amenities for the ENI employees.¹²³ It is therefore emblematic that Alberta Radelli finds her own death here, close to the industrial complex that is a famous example of the entrepreneurial spirit of the post-war years.

Crime draws from the opportunities opened up by economic growth and develops around the new centres of power. Inspector Santamaria, however, cautions against taking too simplistic a view of the new metropolitan criminality and compares the belief that, in recent years, a generation of ruthless criminals has replaced the traditional, gentlemanly

¹²¹ Foot, p. 23.

¹²² Scerbanenco, *Venere*, p. 75.

¹²³ Marco Biraghi, Gabriella Lo Ricco, and Silvia Micheli, *Guida all’architettura di Milano, 1954-2014* (Milan: Hoepli, 2013), pp. 20-21.

malavita, to certain unrealistic reveries of the past, in which memories are transfigured and sensory perceptions become more intense.

I criminali – pareva a lui – erano sempre stati violenti e sempre ‘nuovi’, cioè un passo più avanti della polizia. [...] Rimpiangere la malavita ‘di una volta’ era un po’ come rimpiangere il gusto delle albicocche dell’infanzia o le estati interminabilmente serene di un passato meteorologico immaginario.¹²⁴

While it would clearly overstate the case to suggest that crime undergoes a sort of anthropological mutation almost overnight, it is undeniable that the new socio-economic circumstances of post-war Italy influence the evolution of crime. In this regard, Paoli has observed that ‘the involvement of the Mafia in the criminal scene of Milan in the 1960s is, in fact, one of the key elements in the evolution of crime in the urban centres of the North, together with political frustration [...], the loss of traditional values and the consequent cynicism and lack of morality’.¹²⁵ The same observations may apply to other Italian cities and, to a lesser extent, post-war Italian society as a whole. The texts examined in this chapter, and especially the Lamberti novels, offer an insight into organised criminal activities that may be considered modern in terms of their organisational methods and transnational scale. In other words, they show that, with the increasing interconnectedness of Western societies after World War II, cross-border criminal activities such as drug smuggling, arms trafficking, prostitution, and financial crimes, become more globalised. As for Fruttero & Lucentini, it may be argued that, while *La donna della domenica* encompasses many of the stylistic features of the traditional *giallo*, such as the enclosed space of the murder and the detective’s psychological enquiry, undertaken within the well-defined circles of a conservative urban society, *A che punto è la notte* features a complex criminal organisation with transboundary interests. The criminal plan at the core of the story, betrays an in-depth knowledge of economic activity and production, and, indeed, it emerges over the course of the novel that the mastermind behind it is Fiat executive Musumanno. Generally speaking, however, the international dimension of crime belongs more to Scerbanenco’s fiction, which draws on the reputation of global industrial centre that Milan achieves in the 1950s and 1960s.

¹²⁴ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Notte*, p. 116.

¹²⁵ Paoli, *Giorgio Scerbanenco*, p. 99.

Among the texts under scrutiny in this chapter, Scerbanenco's *Traditori di tutti* and Fruttero & Lucentini's *A che punto è la notte* are especially illustrative of the urban tendency toward crime, since they show most clearly that urban growth accompanies the development of criminal activities. The skein of interconnected murders, in *Traditori di tutti*, is mostly perpetrated along the *strade provinciali* and waterways (*navigli*) that connect Milan to the municipalities of the hinterland: Buccinasco, Banco Romano, and Ca' Torino. Susanna Paganica pushes the car with Turiddu Sompani and Adele Terrini into the water of the Alzaia Naviglio Pavese, at the point of intersection between a countryside road 'ancora commoventemente campagnola'¹²⁶ and a more recently developed *strada statale* leading to Milan. This spot has been chosen carefully, by virtue of the peripheral location, but also of the proximity of the road link that allows Susanna, after the murder, to get a lift into town and organise her escape. In the novel, a similar fate awaits Giovanna Marelli and Silvano Solvere, whose car ends up in the water of the Naviglio Grande, near Ronchetto sul Naviglio, in a desperate attempt to escape a shootout. *Traditori di tutti*'s primary focus on the suburbs is symptomatic of the transformations that Milan was undergoing in those years, expanding from the centre outward. This is also suggested by the fact that the arms trafficking that Duca is investigating is organised through a well-oiled system of meeting places and delivery and collection points, which, once again, are mainly located in the suburbs of Milan. The two main examples are the Trattoria Binaschina, restaurant that is a front for illegal activities and is situated along a countryside road outside Milan, and Ulrico Brambilla's butcher shops, which provide the transit points for the illegal arms smuggling. The crime group trading arms is based in Milan but has ramifications in Genoa, France, and the Alto Adige region, where the weapons are eventually consigned to the local terrorists. Brambilla's chain of butcher shops, which has expanded from the city centre to the suburbs (more specifically, in Banco Romano and Ca' Torino), is once again indicative of the growth of the city.

In *A che punto è la notte*, we read that a number of *mafiosi* from the South of the country have been relocated to Turin's suburbs, following the court order known as *soggiorno obbligato*: a policy of forced resettlement for criminals affiliated with a mafia group, who were moved to a different place within the national territory, to serve the twofold purpose of removing them from their areas of origin and keeping them under law

¹²⁶ Scerbanenco, *Traditori*, pp. 8-9.

enforcement.¹²⁷ In this sense, the development of crime reveals patterns of industrialisation on the national scale, and not only within the city, since, arguably, the public authorities that decide to relocate these serious offenders to the cities of the North, do so on the basis of the shared idea of Northern Italy as the virtuous and productive half of the country. In other words, the idea that such an environment may exert a positive influence on deviant behaviours, by cutting off the links between the criminals and their place of origin. It is also interesting to note that the social geography of Turin and Milan, and particularly the divide between centre and periphery, tends to reproduce these national imbalances. As Lobsinger has observed, ‘the uneven urban development of the economic miracle echoed the problems associated with the Italian *mezzogiorno*’, for it was mainly ‘split into centres of wealth and peripheries of poverty’.¹²⁸ If it is true that crime follows the geography of industrialisation, the same may be said about deindustrialisation and, specifically, the landscape of suburban Turin in *A che punto è la notte*. The final pages of the novel take place in disused industrial spaces in the peripheries of the city, where the criminals have been meeting to develop their plan involving money laundering. The crime group has set up its headquarters in an abandoned foundry, once belonging to Fiat, which has been left unused to deteriorate as a result of a series of corporate spin-offs.¹²⁹ In a way that is reminiscent of other descriptions of chaotic environment that we have found elsewhere in the book, the foundry area is surrounded by a desolate landscape of ‘tetti di fabbriche, capannoni, piccole officine, depositi, silos di cemento, sparsi villini, lontani falansteri, gobbe di tennis coperti, come balene arenate.’¹³⁰

In terms of urban geographies of crime, it is also worth mentioning the sexual topography of Milan in *Venere privata*, which explores the contemporary situation of organised and irregular prostitution in the city. In the novel, prostitution takes place in central as well as outer areas of the city, showing how ‘the absence of any definable red-light district in the city [of Milan] makes the whole urban area available for trade’.¹³¹

¹²⁷ As Fruttero and Lucentini put it, the *soggiorno obbligato* involves ‘l’idea di allontanare quei criminali dal loro *habitat* in Sicilia e in Calabria, costringendoli a vivere nei piccoli comuni attorno alle metropoli del nord, dove l’ambiente li avrebbe domati, se non addirittura redenti’ (*Notte*, p. 340). On this topic, see also Alessandro Coletti, *Mafie: storia della criminalità organizzata nel Mezzogiorno* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1995), and Romano Canosa, *Storia della criminalità in Italia dal 1946 ad oggi* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1995).

¹²⁸ Lobsinger, p. 81.

¹²⁹ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Notte*, p. 566.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 507.

¹³¹ Foot, p. 13.

Venere privata tells the story of two young women, Alberta and Livia, who have been experimenting with occasional prostitution, partly for a material need to earn extra money and partly to observe the trade with a scientific eye, for purposes of sociological research (Livia is indeed a former student of sociology). Alberta is approached one day by an elegant old man, who persuades her to follow him to a photography studio and take some nude photographs. These photographs turn out to be part of the strategy of an international network dedicated to exploiting young women, and the decision to follow the man costs Alberta her life. Duca's plan to lure out and arrest the man who has approached Alberta, involves her friend Livia acting as the bait and walking for several days in the area between Piazza della Scala, Piazza San Babila and Piazza San Carlo, like 'una signorina che cerca qualcuno o qualche cosa, un negozio, o che aspetta l'ora di un appuntamento.'¹³² We can see that, through the theme of prostitution, Scerbanenco gives prominence to the topography of Milan. The central streets and landmarks feature, indeed, prominently in the novel in connection with the theme of prostitution, as is also shown by the following example.

In quel tratto di viale che dall'Arco del Sempione mira al Castello Sforzesco, anche appena passate le dieci del mattino, vi sono sul bordo dello stradone accattivanti figure femminili [...] che sanno di operare in una grande metropoli dove non vi sono provinciali limiti di orario o conformistiche divisioni tra notte e giorno.¹³³

The relevance of the prostitution theme in Italian crime stories of the 1960s and 1970s, as shown, for instance, by the examples of *Venere privata* and *La donna della domenica*,¹³⁴ may to some extent be a reflection of the 1958 Legge Merlin and the debate it sparked. The Merlin law was the result of the ten-year battle fought by senator Lina Merlin against the exploitation of prostitutes. When, after ten years of political negotiation, the bill was finally approved, it appeared, however, to be a heavily revised version of Merlin's original proposal, which was to maintain prostitution legal and offer assistance and provisions to former prostitutes, while reinforcing the punitive measures against their customers. The final version of the new legislation failed instead to recognise

¹³² Scerbanenco, *Venere*, p. 160.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹³⁴ In *La donna della domenica*, the prostitutes that work the hills and woods around Turin, often end up meeting their clients within the property of Mrs Tabusso.

and guarantee the basic rights of the prostitutes. As Tambor has commented, ‘what Merlin framed as a liberating reform became a protective, moralizing law which upheld the isolation and maintained the status of prostitutes as second-class citizens.’¹³⁵

Signs of the evolution of metropolitan criminality may also be detected in specific urban places and in the new connotations that they assume in the post-war period. One of these places is certainly Milan’s Stazione Centrale, which features prominently in the literature and cinema of the time as a monument to the modern industrial city.¹³⁶ Traditionally ‘a place of exchange and the settling of accounts’,¹³⁷ the station is, for instance, central in Scerbanenco’s short story ‘Stazione centrale ammazzare subito’, where it provides the main transit point for an illegal trade of diamonds. The members of the criminal organisation meet and exchange the diamonds here, before blending into the station crowds. Another emblematic place, Milan’s ring road has been ‘a topos of Milanese crime fiction since Scerbanenco’s first description of it.’¹³⁸ The *tangenziale*, or *circonvallazione*, separates both physically and symbolically Milan city centre from outer urban areas, and acts as a gateway that allows the action to take place within and outside of these boundaries.¹³⁹ The fact that, more broadly, Scerbanenco’s crime stories frequently depict the modern road network, bears witness to the sharp increase in mobility and major road improvements of the boom years. In *Venere privata*, for instance, Alberta and Davide travel at high speed along the Autostrada del Sole, inaugurated in 1964, in order to be in Florence for lunch and get back to Milan on time for the *aperitivo*, embracing the new values of the boom.¹⁴⁰ Elsewhere, thoroughfares and motorways allow criminals to escape the city more easily when they are chased by the police.¹⁴¹ While in *La donna della domenica*, Turin is a big city and yet is not big enough, but actually retains

¹³⁵ Molly Tambor, ‘Prostitutes and Politicians: The Women's Rights Movement in the Legge Merlin Debates’, in *Women in Italy, 1945-1960: An Interdisciplinary Study*, ed. by P. Morris (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 131-46 (p. 131). On the same topic, see also Sandro Bellassai, *La legge del desiderio: il progetto Merlin e l'Italia degli anni cinquanta* (Rome: Carocci, 2006); Mary Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy, 1860-1915*, 2nd edn (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999); and Perry Wilson, *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹³⁶ A significant example is provided by the opening scene of Luchino Visconti’s movie *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1960), which is discussed in Chapter 2. In *Traditori di tutti*, the Central Station is described as a Babylonian temple (p. 16).

¹³⁷ Foot, p. 7.

¹³⁸ Pieri, ‘Milano nera’, p. 138.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Scerbanenco, *Venere*, p. 60.

¹⁴¹ In *Basta col cianuro*, a smuggler is arrested by the police as he travels at high speed on the motorway, in an attempt to escape revenge from the criminal organisation that he has just decided to leave. In *Piccolo hôtel per sadici*, two killers attempt a similar escape, driving from Milan to Rome. Both short stories are included in *Milano calibre 9*.

a provincial mindset, in *A che punto è la notte*, the industrial splendour appears to be a thing of the past, which is traceable in the scars of the landscape. It may be concluded that, as financial capital of the country, Milan's landmarks have been more inclined to capture the public imagination as iconographic symbols of the boom. Despite the fact that Turin's population grows exponentially in the post-war years, exceeding one million inhabitants,¹⁴² in Fruttero & Lucentini's view, the city has never risen above its small-town mentality. 'Il vecchio nucleo provinciale di Torino', as Santamaria names it, seemingly resists all attacks from the outside world.¹⁴³

The social and anthropological implications of Italy's economic growth are an additional factor to be considered when discussing the link between urbanisation and crime. As Lefebvre has observed, the city is also a physical repository of the desires, needs, satisfaction or dissatisfaction of its inhabitants.¹⁴⁴ In this chapter, we have already seen textual examples of crimes engendered by obstacles that prevent the characters from achieving their aspirations. As has been stated several times, the Italian post-war model of economic development ultimately emphasised individual initiative and achievement, championing an idea of success in terms of the attainment of money. In the novels under scrutiny, this individualistic culture reverberates through the actions of the characters who, being unable to access materialistic goods legitimately, get involved in illegal activities.¹⁴⁵ In Scerbanenco's Milan, where 'everyone aspires to move ahead and upwards',¹⁴⁶ crimes are often committed by underprivileged people who aim to afford the material lifestyles and luxury goods available in the city. In other words, the Lamberti novels show that the opportunities offered by the modern city are not within everyone's reach and that the frustrated desires and aspirations of the characters often develop into crime. Similarly, in *La donna della domenica*, a feeling of frustration that reveals the broader conflict between old and new money in Turin, leads Signora Tabusso to kill Garrone. Prostitution provides a further example: in Scerbanenco's crime stories, women are either forced into the sex trade by a man who is close to them and that they trust, or

¹⁴² Vanessa Maher, 'Immigration and Social Identities', in *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by D. Forgacs and R. Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 160-77 (p. 166).

¹⁴³ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Donna*, p. 168.

¹⁴⁴ Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, p. 109.

¹⁴⁵ While it is true that the economic boom changed Italy's cultural landscape dramatically, Foot also stresses that cultural forms adapt and resist, and puts into question Pasolini's idea of a hegemonic cultural model emerging in post-war Italy, as a result of the levelling effect of mass consumerism (pp. 21-23).

¹⁴⁶ Burns, 'Founding Fathers', p. 33.

they decide to become prostitutes for financial difficulties that would make it impossible for them to live in an expensive city like Milan.

In the examined texts, crime follows the transformations of the city also in the sense that it shares some of the organisational methods of modern industry, the existence and growth of which is closely tied to the urban environment. When the criminal group of *Venere privata* is forced to move its activities from the city centre to the suburbs of Milan, in order to attract less attention, Duca comments that ‘si sono decentrati anche loro, come le grandi fabbriche.’¹⁴⁷ Here, Duca is suggesting that the crime group shares some of the principles of modern business management and particularly the division of functions and activities into smaller, delocalised units. Duca also notices that their activity is organised ‘esattamente come un ufficio importazione-esportazione’.¹⁴⁸ In a similar way, the illegal trade at the core of ‘Stazione centrale ammazzare subito’, is reminiscent, in its methodical organisation and operational efficiency, of the production lines of Fiat, the Italian car giant.¹⁴⁹ Criminal and capitalist systems come to coincide in the scene of Vicini’s murder, in *A che punto è la notte*. As mentioned above, at least two Fiat executives, Dottor Musumanno and Ingegnere Vicini himself, are implicated in the financial fraud that Santamaria is unravelling. The following passage, describing the scene of the murder, explicitly compares criminal and industrial worlds through the image of the gun that is found next to Vicini’s body in the basement of the Fiat headquarters in Turin.

L’arma, una Beretta cal. 9 corto, dopo i rilievi era stata provvisoriamente posata su uno stretto tavolo bianco, fra un telefono e gli altri oggetti tolti dalle tasche del morto. Nera, metallica, *funzionale*, non contrastava affatto col paesaggio *asettico* del centro elaboratori, occupava anche lei il suo *esatto* spazio aziendale.¹⁵⁰

The gun that has just fired the fatal shot occupies its own specific place in the business setting and in the logic of industrial capitalism, for it shares the same parameters of efficiency and cold, tactical precision.

¹⁴⁷ Scerbanenco, *Venere*, p. 178.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁴⁹ Scerbanenco, *Milano calibro 9*, p. 102.

¹⁵⁰ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Notte*, p. 487 (my emphasis).

This section of the chapter has explored the connection between urbanisation and violent crime in the texts under scrutiny, hinting at the role that the periphery plays within it. The following section goes into more detail on the representation of suburban areas in the examined novels, which generally confirms their shared image of bleak and dangerous areas. Textual interpretation is supported with arguments based on a close reading of Foot's study of the image and role of the modern periphery in the collective imagination. Foot has provided a crucial contribution in deconstructing some of the main stereotypes associated with the modern suburbs in Italy, by demonstrating that they generally rely on a static view of the city. While Foot focuses on the Milan case, his considerations may be extended to other Italian cities, for the urban fringe has generally been seen nationwide in negative terms and as a problem.¹⁵¹

3.3.2 Periphery

Foot observes that the dichotomy between centre and periphery relies on an ideal and conservative model of the city, which is based upon the constructed opposition between the urban core, seen as the custodian of identity and tradition, and the periphery, considered to be a bleak product of unregulated urban growth. This view, however, fails to acknowledge that spatial boundaries within the city are constantly redefined and that the periphery 'moves around', in conjunction with processes of gentrification and the creation of faster road links to the centre.¹⁵² To put it in other words, urban areas are not monads, separated from each other, but, rather, are connected together in a relation of mutual dependence. Foot goes on to argue that the abstract dual model of the city has generated the ideas of 'non-cityness' and otherness, commonly associated with the periphery as a spatial and anthropological entity. On the one hand, the reputation of the suburbs as 'non-city' draws on their supposed lack of history and traditional features, such as squares and monuments;¹⁵³ on the other, the idea of the periphery as 'failed city' puts the emphasis on the alleged poor quality and bleakness of the 1960s urban

¹⁵¹ Foot, p. 135.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-41.

developments, emphasising the role of building speculation in shaping the built environment of those years.

A few examples from *A che punto è la notte* further illustrate the point that Foot is seeking to make here. As stated above, the novel is framed within the setting of suburban Turin and opens with the description of a residential neighbourhood denominated Brussone, which has developed on the urban belt during the 1960s. In the novel, the Brussone project is essentially presented in terms of architectural failure.

Vent'anni prima, dopo molti viaggi-studio nei paesi scandinavi e in Inghilterra, un gruppo di architetti e urbanisti aveva deciso di costruire all'estrema periferia di Torino un quartiere modello, dove due o tremila cittadini fra i meno abbienti potessero vivere, per una somma alla portata dei loro guadagni, in mezzo alla natura. Per questo esperimento era stata prescelta la zona di una vecchia cascina (subito demolita) denominata 'Il Brussone', e su quei campi e prati e orti tra la Dora e la Stura erano sorte case 'a misura d'uomo', ossia a tre piani, di mattoni e calcestruzzo a vista, senza ascensori e con terrazzetti chiusi da alte grate di cemento, dietro le quali gli inquilini avrebbero dovuto stendere ad asciugare la biancheria, come facevano i loro omologhi flagellati dai venti artici.¹⁵⁴

The model neighbourhood of Brussone incorporates some of the modernist ideals, such as the simplified, purpose-oriented architectural forms, and the emphasis on the functionality of buildings. The development project follows a Scandinavian model of minimalism and efficiency that fails to adapt to the peculiar situation of Turin's belt: the result is a failed attempt to embody an ideal of modern living and meet the social needs of the residents. The current state of desolation and decay ('*segni di morte e cancellazione*')¹⁵⁵ of the area, denounce the many shortcomings of the project. We are told, for instance, that '*ciuffi d'erba giallastra, calve radure, informi gibbosità e tumuli di aiuole sconfitte*'¹⁵⁶ are all that remains of the blooming meadows imagined by the architects.

¹⁵⁴ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Notte*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Moreover, Fruttero and Lucentini's description of Brussone, tells us something about the alleged lack of history of the periphery. The initial pages of *A che punto è la notte* dwell on the Brussone street toponymy, repeating like a refrain that 'in via dei Rododendri non c'era nessun rododendro. [...] nel viale degli Ontani non c'era nessun ontano, come non c'era nessun ranuncolo in via dei Ranuncoli.'¹⁵⁷ On the one hand, this observation relates to the artificiality of the housing project and the fact that, clearly, it does not fit well into the urban context of Turin. On the other, it speaks of the memorability of places. Indeed, as De Certeau has pointed out, place names that refer to the history of the city, evoke feelings of identification and attachment, which ultimately makes those places habitable.¹⁵⁸ Unlike the street names of the traditional city, which commonly refer to meaningful historic events or urban figures that fulfil a role of identity-building,¹⁵⁹ the Brussone toponyms sound like empty names. In the novel, Brussone is therefore a place with no character that resembles many other places on the urban belt. It is replicable like 'un pezzo di viale cittadino trapiantato tale e quale a venti chilometri da Torino',¹⁶⁰ and it is aseptic, with its 'viali sempre più larghi, aggiornati, indispensabili, come elenchi telefonici, in cui non mancava niente tranne la vitalità di un errore, la suggestione del superfluo.'¹⁶¹

We have seen earlier that, in *A che punto è la notte*, the emphasis on the impersonality of the suburbs also hints at the loss of local features, due to rapid economic growth. In the following example, the lack of identity of the modern peripheries is reflected by the mismatch between, on the one hand, modern highways and ring roads, and, on the other, fields and pasture trails that belong to the pre-industrial past.

Fra tutti gli antichi paesi della cintura, la città, scoppiando, aveva piantato le sue schegge, disseminato i suoi brandelli. Sentieri da pascolo in terra battuta correvano accanto a superstrade a quattro corsie, tortuose carreggiate comunali e provinciali si dilatavano in grandi arterie di circonvallazione [...]. In quella aggrovigliata trama di snodi e raccordi, di bivî, quadrivî, sopravvie, diramazioni, ponti a schiena d'asino e campate

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

¹⁵⁸ De Certeau, pp. 106-09.

¹⁵⁹ Botolv Helleland, 'Place Names and Identities', in *Names and Identities*, Special Issue of *Oslo Studies in Language*, 4.2 (2012), 95-116 < <https://www.journals.uio.no/index.php/osla/article/view/313/438>> [accessed 21 September 2018].

¹⁶⁰ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Notte*, p. 131.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 418.

d'acciaio e di cemento, orientarsi era diventato un problema anche di giorno e senza nebbia.¹⁶²

Two elements contained in the extract are worth mentioning: the image of the concrete jungle that symbolises the out-of-control growth of the periphery and the resulting sense of physical disorientation. In his study of the modern suburbs, Foot identifies exactly the same elements – the architectural disorder and the facility to get lost – as two fundamental tropes that have shaped the dominant discourse on the periphery.¹⁶³

A further example of the fear of losing oneself within the city, which brings to mind Freud's account of his own uncanny experience of getting lost in Genoa,¹⁶⁴ is provided, in *La donna della domenica*, by the episode of Anna Carla walking along the Po riverside and suddenly finding herself in an unknown part of Turin. She is deep in thought and fails to notice straightaway that she is moving away from the familiar streets of the centre. Her pensive mood, as she goes over the argument that she has had with her friend Massimo the night before, harmonises with the bleak landscape that she soon encounters, as she walks out towards the periphery.

Continuò lungo l'argine: a destra aveva le acque basse e grigie del fiume, sorvegliate da lontane figure di pescatori; a sinistra un vasto e accidentato prato con alti mucchi di rifiuti, profilati contro un orizzonte di rigide strutture e neri tralicci che infittivano, in direzione di Chivasso, lungo un'arteria di grande traffico coi lampioni già incongruamente accesi. Lo squallore era calligrafico, perfezionistico, arrivava alla pianta d'acacia solitaria e morente, alla scatoletta di sardine arrugginita tra le ortiche del sentiero.¹⁶⁵

Interestingly, the description shares some of the main features that have been identified in relation to Turin's urban belt (the absence of vegetation that emphasises the bleakness of the suburbs) and Scerbanenco's periphery (city waste and pollution). The latter are the undesirable products of urbanisation, 'the waste and filth of the industrial processes upon

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁶³ Foot, p. 143.

¹⁶⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Uncanny*, trans. by D. McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 121-62 (p. 144).

¹⁶⁵ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Donna*, p. 25.

which urban life is predicated',¹⁶⁶ which symbolise the underside of economic development. Moreover, the above extract suggests that Turin's distinctive urban features gradually blur as Anna Carla moves out of the city centre, the area in which she ends up being characterised by a thoroughfare clogged with traffic and a row of anonymous tower blocks looming in the distance.

When Anna Carla finally looks around more attentively, she sees an unfamiliar and somewhat sinister landscape. At this point, she begins to feel unsafe.

Dall'acqua aveva ora cominciato a salire un'umidità nebbiosa, dal cielo scendeva una cappa d'un giallo sporco e freddo. Non si viene da sole in un posto così, pensò con disagio. Tornò indietro, ma sforzandosi di non correre, per non sentirsi ancora più stupida.¹⁶⁷

While the passage should be read through Fruttero and Lucentini's ironic filter, it still tells us something about social boundaries and women's freedom of movement within the city. Here, the upper-class lady coming from an elegant neighbourhood of the city centre appears to be lost, as if she had crossed an invisible boundary. She ends up in a seemingly alien territory and instinctively rushes back, because this is no place for a woman to go alone. The periphery emerges again as an anonymous place where it is easy to get lost and which is potentially dangerous, especially for women. In order to find a periphery that is genuinely scary, however, we must turn to the Lamberti novels.

As Foot has pointed out, the Milanese periphery has spatially dominated the city centre since the boom years.¹⁶⁸ Among the housing estates that were created or completed during the 1950s and 1960s, one may list Comasina, Lambrate, Quarto Oggiaro, Gratosoglio, Gallarate, Buccinasco and Corsico. These housing projects were intended to accommodate the needs of the growing working class, whose ranks were increased, in those years, by the arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the South of the country and provinces of the North. The territory of Milan is significantly redefined by the creation of modern peripheries that overlap with the old ones, developed during the

¹⁶⁶ Marco Paoli, 'The Evolution of Crime in Post-war Italy in the Works of Carlo Lizzani and Giorgio Scerbanenco' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Salford, 2010), p. 124. In the short story 'L'avarizia', the brother of the female protagonist Ursula, who works as an actress in Rome, lives in Milan 'in una specie di baracca vicino a una raffineria dove si moriva dalla puzza' (Scerbanenco, *Il Cinquecentodelitti*, p. 47).

¹⁶⁷ Fruttero and Lucentini, *Donna*, p. 26.

¹⁶⁸ Foot, p. 5.

first industrial revolution of the early 1900s. Suffice it to say that, already in the 1950s, Milan's municipal boundaries stretch from Monza in the North to Pavia in the South.¹⁶⁹ Some of the newly developed suburbs become soon infamous as crime-ridden areas and ghettos for Southern immigrants. This is especially true in the case of, on the one hand, Comasina and Quarto Oggiaro in Milan, and, on the other, La Falchera, Mirafiori Sud and Le Vallette in Turin.¹⁷⁰ These areas, which in the public imagination have long been associated with social violence and marginalisation, provide material of interest for the authors that in those years are writing about the city, like Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini. Another crucial example, with regard to Milan, is provided by Giovanni Testori's cycle *I segreti di Milano*.

While, crime-wise, Scerbanenco makes no clear distinction between the city centre and peripheries, for, in his novels, these areas are equally unsafe, the suburbs allow criminals to operate more discreetly and escape the city more easily, when in danger of being caught. As Pieri has commented, 'the lumpenproletarian zones of the city are captured by Scerbanenco as they shift from the city centre to the new peripheries, which became the perfect setting for the new violent and often pointless crimes of the new industrial city.'¹⁷¹ To put it simply, what happens in the periphery is less traceable. In *I ragazzi del massacro*, Duca struggles to believe that the eleven students have killed their teacher for fun or because they have been driven by some uncontrollable impulse, given that 'da piazzale Loreto al Parco Lambro hanno tutti i posti che vogliono per organizzare certe festine senza correre quasi nessun pericolo di essere presi.'¹⁷² He thinks, rather, that they have been instigated by someone else; most likely an adult with a proper motive. We know that he is right and that Marisela Domenici is the real mastermind behind the murder. While the periphery is a privileged location for illegal activities, it also allows criminals to keep a strong connection with the city, thanks to the proximity of road links to the urban centre. The reasons why maintaining this connection is crucial have been discussed above: criminals who have restricted access to the resources offered by the city, are more likely to face lower pecuniary returns and are more exposed to the risk of arrest. In other words, it is easier for the police to track criminals in a small town than in dense urban areas. For this reason, in *I ragazzi del massacro*, Duca is able to deduce that

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁷¹ Pieri, 'Milano nera', p. 134.

¹⁷² Scerbanenco, *Ragazzi*, p. 81.

Marisella and Carolino, the student she has kidnapped, must be hidden somewhere in the urban periphery or in some place not far from Milan.¹⁷³

The issue discussed above of the social and anthropological implications of economic changes, applies even more evidently to the characters who live in the suburbs, as areas that have allegedly failed to forge a positive sense of community and identity.¹⁷⁴ We know, for instance, that the eleven students of *I ragazzi del massacro* come from socially disadvantaged families who live in Milan's suburbs. The profiles that Duca reads on the night of the interrogation contain detailed information on their family situations, with parents who are alcoholics, drug addicts, or, at best, simply neglectful. That being said, Scerbanenco's stylistic operation is also to return dignity to the periphery from an aesthetic point of view, as an integral part of the city. In *Traditori di tutti*, for instance, we read that 'Ca' Torino fa parte di Romano Banco, che è una frazione di Buccinasco, che è un comune vicino a Corsico, che è vicino a Milano, praticamente è sempre Milano.'¹⁷⁵ Scerbanenco's novels, moreover, also present the alternative image of the countryside as idyll. The villa owned by Ingegnere Auseri in Brianza, surrounded by greenery and clean air, reflects the value of healthier living, which is ultimately the privilege of the rich who can afford this escape from the city.¹⁷⁶

3.4 Conclusions

This chapter has developed further the argument discussed in Chapter 2, by still looking at the Milan and Turin of the 1960s and 1970s, but from the original point of view offered by crime fiction and, more specifically, the crime novels of Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini. Like Bianciardi and Volponi, Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini capture the changing face of Milan and Turin in the post-war period and document the difficulty of grasping the logic of radical transformations. The texts examined in this chapter do so by focusing on the aspects of the city that escape comprehension and evoke feelings of

¹⁷³ 'Un rifugio come questo, non esiste in una città, al massimo alla sua estrema periferia, molto più facilmente in campagna, anche vicino alla città, ma non in un paese, un paese piccolo è il luogo più pericoloso che esista per nascondersi' (Ibid., p. 195).

¹⁷⁴ Foot, p. 137.

¹⁷⁵ Scerbanenco, *Traditori*, p. 148.

¹⁷⁶ Burns, 'Founding Fathers', p. 32.

anxiety. Scerbanenco's books mirror this epistemological uncertainty by emphasising Milan's dark and mysterious side and by documenting the rise of pitiless violence in the city in the post-war period. The Lamberti novels do not offer a reassuring solution, but rather reverberate anxiety through problematic endings that seem to question the very possibility of an enduring justice. Fruttero & Lucentini's Turin is also difficult to navigate. In their novels, the tension between familiar and unfamiliar, which is constitutive of the uncanny, is reflected by the elusive and chameleon-like nature of the city itself. In both *La donna della domenica* and *A che punto è la notte*, the multiple viewpoints offered by the characters, who belong to different social groups and inhabit diverse areas within the city, are functional to bring to the fore Turin's rapidly changing geography. Broadly speaking, the literary descriptions of Milan and Turin, in the examined novels, entail a critique of the changes brought about by economic growth, by emphasising, as in the case of the authors analysed in Chapter 2, the negative impact of rapid modernisation, both in terms of the concrete urban environment and behaviour of city dwellers.

The literature review section of Chapter 1 contextualised the mutual interconnections which inform the analysis in this chapter, between the city, the uncanny and crime fiction, as a genre that is closely tied to urban history and has traditionally drawn inspiration from the experience of the city. The uncanny proves a particularly useful tool to analyse the specific context of post-war Italy, since it is able to illuminate some of the tensions that shape this crucial moment of recent Italian history. On the one hand, the rapid socio-economic changes that irrupt into the habitual reality mirror the dichotomy between familiar and unfamiliar at the core of the uncanny; on the other, the issue of Italy's unresolved relation with the past echoes the idea of the uncanny as re-emergence of the repressed. The emphasis that the texts put on the mysterious and unfathomable aspects of city life has been interpreted, in this chapter, as a reflection of the contradictions of the post-war period. Specifically, it has been argued that the post-war model of development, on the one hand, fails to integrate a critical examination of the nation's recent past and, on the other, creates the conditions that lead up to the social conflicts and political instability of the following decades. These later developments of Italian society are captured in *A che punto è la notte*, which is infused with a crepuscular atmosphere and is significantly set in the suburbs of the city, traditionally an uncanny urban location. The texts under scrutiny mirror anxieties about post-war unregulated

urban growth and increase in violent crimes, by illuminating the hidden and somewhat sinister side of the city, beyond the façade of progress and efficiency, which represents the dark side of the boom itself.

This chapter has also explored, through the examples of Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini, the mutual interchange that exists between post-war Italy's urban renewal and the development of the Italian crime fiction genre in the 1960s and 1970s. The texts have been read as an aesthetic response to the urban transformations of those decades, which provide a rich source of inspiration for crime writers. As was discussed in the chapter, modern crime literature generally reverberates anxieties about the city, by rejecting the unitary point of view of classic detective stories and, consequently, the illusion of mastering urban space: an approach that results in an original contribution to knowledge of the city. This is exactly the case with the texts examined in this chapter, which mirror the anxiety about post-war rapid urbanisation and reflect the difficulty of coming to terms with socio-spatial transformations. As was seen in this chapter, the 1960s and 1970s represent in many ways a watershed in the tradition of Italian crime fiction, and Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini play an essential role in this development. Crucially, Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini give centrality to the material urban setting, paving the way for the tradition of Italian crime stories, which, in the following decades, increasingly concentrate around specific cities and geographical areas of the national territory. As has been seen, the delayed topographical tradition within Italian crime literature is partly the result of the censorial attitude of the Fascist regime towards Italian crime stories set in Italy.

Although Milan and Turin have been the settings of mystery stories since the proto-history of the genre in Italy and have provided the background to the work of celebrated detective storywriters (for instance, Augusto De Angelis), with Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini they acquire new materiality and strength, becoming functional to their social critique. Scerbanenco transposes the atmospheres of the American hard-boiled into the reality of 1960s Milan, which has ever since become the *noir* city *par excellence* in the Italian literary imagination. The new, profit-oriented and competitive reality of post-war Milan is the setting that fosters the violent crimes in Scerbanenco's crime fiction. In Fruttero & Lucentini's novels, the relevance of the Turinese setting is such that the city becomes an additional character in the story. In both *La donna della domenica* and *A che punto è la notte*, the multiple viewpoints offered by characters that

are inspired by real Turinese social types, sketches a composite portrait of the transformations of the city in the 1970s. Furthermore, the popular and critical success enjoyed by *La donna della domenica* and *A che punto è la notte*, has been a decisive factor in the changing attitude of the Italian cultural establishment towards crime fiction, which, until then, had largely been considered low and escapist literature.

Section 3.3, 'Dangerous City', has concentrated on the link between rapid urbanisation and the evolution of crime, developing further the idea of a connection between urban transformations and successful crime stories in the surveyed period of time. This section has provided examples of how, in the texts, crime mirrors the growth of the city and follows the geography of industrialisation, by also exploring the issue of the social and anthropological consequences of the boom, and the evolution of criminal methods that show the efficiency of modern industry. Particular attention has been given to the representation of the periphery, as geographical and anthropological entity that occupies a specific place in the uncanny imagery of the city. The novels of Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini generally represent the suburbs of Milan and Turin as bleak places that have failed to forge a sense of community, where, consequently, crime develops more easily. In the Lamberti novels, city centre and peripheries are equally dangerous, but the latter exacerbate the negative aspects of urbanisation and are sites of de-socialisation and social violence. In Fruttero & Lucentini's novels, and especially in *A che punto è la notte*, the periphery lacks history, identity and coherence with the rest of the urban fabric. As Foot has demonstrated, the idea of the periphery as a non-city, a place that does not meet certain standards of good living and that is potentially dangerous, is measured against an hegemonic and ideal model of the city.¹⁷⁷ The periphery is in fact a relative concept, since, on the one hand, it moves around and changes together with the rest of the city, and, on the other, it is subjectively defined: for instance, for the rich Anna Carla, who enjoys a privileged position in Turin's urban society, periphery is what lies just outside her elegant neighbourhood in central Turin. Moreover, it is important to note that the texts under scrutiny ultimately carry out a stylistic operation that assigns dignity to the periphery, as the setting where their stories unfold, even though its representation is not devoid of stereotypes.

The next chapter is dedicated to another literary genre that, like crime fiction, has struggled to attain recognition within the Italian cultural establishment, namely travel

¹⁷⁷ Foot, p. 145.

writing. The pan-Italian perspective of the examined texts means that the chapter focus expands, so as to embrace the national territory. Chapter 4 therefore complements the previous two chapters, centred on Milan and Turin, by illuminating other areas of the country. At the same time, the presence, in the travel accounts examined in Chapter 4, of themes and images that link to the discussion carried out in the previous two chapters – such as, for instance, the idea of the South as repressed modernity – reinforces the main argument of the dissertation as a whole.

4. Post-War Italian Travel Writing: Piovene, Ortese, Arbasino

4.1 Introduction

The ambiguous place that travel writing occupies within Italy's literary tradition is largely due to the genre's hybrid nature and kinship with other forms of writing, such as journalism and the essay genre.¹ The marginality of travel literature links this genre to crime fiction, which, as was seen in the previous chapter, has also struggled to attain literary dignity within the Italian cultural panorama. Both forms of writing are indeed considered as less important and marginal by a literary establishment that has traditionally privileged matters of style and a rigid partition between the genres over sociological enquiry and literature's involvement with everyday life. This chapter focuses on post-war Italian domestic travel writing, which is to say travel accounts written by Italian authors travelling in Italy: a specific category of travelogues that, in the broader context of the genre, may be considered all the more marginal, for it has received very little critical attention until recent years.² Indeed, also among literary critics, there is a tendency to identify travel literature set in Italy with the work of foreign authors, thus overlooking the internal perspective of Italian writers.³ There is no doubt that, from the Renaissance onwards, and particularly with the tradition of the Grand Tour, which enjoys a great vogue in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Italy has been a privileged destination for international travellers, as an important centre of classical culture. The Italian journey was, indeed, considered a required itinerary at a time in which travel was integral to the education of the European elite and in a cultural context largely dominated by the study of the Classics.⁴ These travellers have shaped, in their accounts, a certain image of the

¹ Joanne Lee, 'Alternative Urban Journeys: Italian Travel Writing and the *Contromano* Series', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 16.2 (2012), 203-14 (pp. 205-06) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2012.682820>> [accessed 7 February 2017].

² See Luca Clerici, 'Alla scoperta del Bel Paese: i titoli delle testimonianze dei viaggiatori italiani in Italia, 1750-1900', *L'Odeporica/Hodoeporics: On Travel Literature*, Special Issue of *Annali d'Italianistica*, 14 (1996), 271-303.

³ Sharon Ouditt and Loredana Polezzi, 'Introduction: Italy as Place and Space', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 16.2 (2012), 97-105 (p. 103) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2012.682807>> [accessed 7 February 2017].

⁴ Jeremy Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 2.

country, also influencing the way in which Italians see themselves.⁵ Nevertheless, during the centuries, Italian authors too have produced a large repertoire of written accounts, documenting their journeys across Italy. In fact, it can be argued that the evolution of Italian travel literature has gone hand in hand with the tradition of foreign travel writing, for travelogues written by Italian authors begin to appear as early as the eighteenth century.⁶

That being said, the dominant way of looking at Italy in travel writing is largely reifying. This predominant perspective has contributed to shape, in the European imagination, the image of Italy as a sort of open-air museum, based on the grandeur of its historical and cultural patrimony. The idea of Italy as the *Bel Paese*, which endures to the present day, conveys the view of a country frozen in the atemporality, and ultimately immobility, of its architectural and natural beauties. Generally speaking, for a long time Italian domestic travel accounts do not emerge as the alternative to this image of Italy codified by foreign travellers, whose itineraries are in some cases retraced by Italian authors themselves. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the latter tend to include, in their accounts, specific and marginal places that are often overlooked by those foreign authors who follow the official paths of the Grand Tour.⁷ Moreover, the development, in the first half of the twentieth century, of Italian landscape photography, chiefly through the activities of the Italian Touring Club and the Alinari brothers, represents a further step in the emergence of a genuinely Italian travel imaginary. The differences and variety captured by these photographic collections challenge the reifying rhetoric of the Grand Tour, even though they partly betray the 'persistence of an old, picturesque image of Italy, born from the intersection of foreign and elite perspectives',⁸ where the latter refer to the politicians and philosophers who have led the process of Italian unification in the Risorgimento.

When I first approached the texts under scrutiny in this chapter, I was mainly interested in investigating if they confirmed these tropes or conversely appropriated them in an original way, through their self-reflective perspective. As my analysis proceeded, I

⁵ Ouditt and Polezzi, p. 97.

⁶ Clerici's survey of Italian domestic travel writing, in his *Il viaggiatore meravigliato*, opens with Antonio Vallisneri's 1714 *Lezione accademica intorno l'origine delle fontane*.

⁷ Clerici, *Viaggiatore*, p. xxviii.

⁸ Roberta R. Valtorta, Sarah P. Hill, and Giuliana Minghelli, 'Photography and the Construction of Italian National Identity', in *Stillness in Motion: Italy, Photography and the Meanings of Modernity*, ed. by R. Valtorta, S. Hill, and G. Minghelli (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2014), pp. 27-56 (p. 43).

have come to realise that this issue is deeply intertwined with a more complex, somewhat postmodern, attitude toward the idea of travel itself that emerges in the post-war period and stems from the existential uncertainty of those years, which provides a central thread in this dissertation. This proposition is supported by the fact that, in the 1950s and 1960s, the journey features increasingly in Italian literature and cinema, becoming a recurring trope for the discovery and appropriation of the national territory, but also a metaphor for self-discovery, especially for those intellectuals who were looking to break with the past and find new sources of inspiration and identification, after the fall of Fascism and the end of the war. In those years, there emerges a multifaceted idea of travel carrying different meanings. Firstly, the journey may provide the occasion for a confrontation with the process of modernisation in Italy and therefore express a tension towards a different understanding of modernity, often blurring into the genre of the reportage. The texts examined in the chapter engage with post-war Italy's changing geography and, in so doing, problematise modes of representation that had long dominated the journey to Italy as the expression of the reifying eye of foreign travellers. Moreover, if, on the one hand, one has the hedonistic idea of travel as *villeggiatura* in the newly developed vacation areas, such as the Riviera Romagnola, on the other, the same years witness the migration of masses of poorer people, especially from the South, to what Guido Piovene describes as 'un aldilà fisico, il Nord, un paese straniero, dove si troverebbe la felicità'.⁹ As Donna Gabaccia has pointed out, the mass internal migrations of the 1950s and 1960s do not represent a completely new phenomenon, for Italians have been among the most mobile people in the world since the Middle Ages.¹⁰ The real novelty is provided by the trajectory and destination of post-war migrants, who move in huge numbers to the North of the country instead of abroad, as had overwhelmingly been the case in the previous centuries and up to that point: this change is a clear sign of the encouraging situation of post-war Italian economy, especially visible in the Northern 'industrial triangle'.¹¹ As Gabaccia has observed, the boom 'changed the character of Italy's international migrations and ended the country's long history as one of the world's most important exporters of labor'.¹² In the post-war years, a further variation of journey is provided by the ethnographic explorations of the South, especially those undertaken by anthropologist

⁹ Guido Piovene, *Viaggio in Italia* (Milan: Mondadori, 1958), p. 663.

¹⁰ Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), pp. 1-3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Ernesto De Martino in an attempt to document the survival of the archaic beliefs and practices of Southern peasant culture, threatened by the irruption of modern lifestyles.

This chapter focuses on the idea that, in post-war Italy, the journey presents an occasion for discovery and self-discovery, against the backdrop of disorientation that affects intellectuals and ordinary Italians alike, in the aftermath of two World Wars and twenty years of dictatorship. After the euphoria of the immediate post-war years, celebrated in Neorealist accounts of heroic resistance and redemption, a different attitude towards the past begins to appear, one that is more interested in collecting and sharing the voices of the marginal and defeated.¹³ A similar tendency may be found in Italian travel writing of the time, which shows a different and more critical attitude toward present-day Italian society and, specifically, the post-war modernisation process. In *Viaggio in Italia*, the account of a three-year travel across the Italian peninsula, Piovene embraces the idea of journey as self-discovery. For instance, in discussing the reasons that have prompted him to embark on his journey ‘pezzo per pezzo’¹⁴ across Italy, he writes: ‘sono curioso dell’Italia, degli italiani e di me stesso’.¹⁵ Piovene therefore anticipates that, in the book, he will turn the investigative lens toward himself, in a process of self-discovery that will be triggered by the people and landscapes encountered along the way.

Viaggio in Italia is one of the texts that will be analysed in this chapter. The book represents a monumental and arguably unparalleled endeavour to document the country in its entirety, providing an ‘inventario delle cose italiane’¹⁶ that Piovene observes as he travels from North to South, one region after the other. Commissioned by the RAI, Italy’s national broadcasting company, *Viaggio in Italia* is the result of the journeys undertaken by Piovene between 1953 and 1956 and was originally written for a series of radio episodes, transmitted during the same years by Radio RAI. The second text that I examine in this chapter, is Anna Maria Ortese’s collection of travel pieces *La lente scura*.¹⁷ The book’s troubled road to publication may confirm what has been observed above about the uncertain status of travel writing within the Italian literary canon. Indeed, Ortese starts to work at a collection of travel pieces in 1952, but then shelves, resumes and revises the projects several times over the following years. Thanks to the philological and

¹³ Ann Hallamore Caesar, 'Post-War Italian Narrative: An Alternative Account', in *Italian Cultural Studies*, ed. by Forgacs and Lumley, pp. 248-60 (p. 250).

¹⁴ Piovene, p. 7.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁷ Anna Maria Ortese, *La lente scura: scritti di viaggio*, ed. by L. Clerici (Milan: Adelphi, 2004).

bibliographical work of Luca Clerici, who has also the merit of having recovered the group of reportages that now constitute the second section of the volume, the book finally comes out in 1991 with the structure that it maintains today.¹⁸ *La lente scura* includes pieces that were written by Ortese from the end of the 1940s to the beginning of the 1960s. While I take into consideration the book as a whole, for I am interested to see how Ortese's style and representation of reality evolve over this period of time, I mostly focus on the articles that were written and published after 1957. By this time, the signs of economic progress have become widely evident, anticipated as they are by a wave of modernisation in Italian cultural life. In particular, the 1956 Hungarian uprising against the Soviet Union and the discussions that it prompts put an end to the totalising control exerted by the PCI, the Italian Communist Party, over left-wing intellectuals, therefore blowing a breath of fresh air into the Italian cultural debate. Evidence of this may be found in the new openness toward sociological approaches and cultural trends, chiefly psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology, which, in Italy, had until then been met with resistance.¹⁹

The historical framework delineated by the primary texts embraces the boom period in Italy, its early stages and immediate aftermath. Piovene documents the incipient transformations as he travels across the country in the middle of the 1950s; Ortese narrates Italy as she sees it for the first time in the 1950s and 1960s, and Alberto Arbasino, the third and final author to be examined in this chapter, publishes his novel *Fratelli d'Italia* in 1963.²⁰ Arbasino, like Guido Ceronetti in more recent years, belongs to the tradition of disenchanted and sarcastic *Viaggio in Italia*, whose origins may be traced back to Lawrence Stern's *Sentimental Journey*.²¹ Elvio Guagnini has argued that this tradition, which moves the subjectivity of the observer into the foreground, may be regarded as a reaction to the eighteenth-century encyclopaedic type of travel writing that had sought to give a comprehensive account of the observed reality.²² In rejecting any pretence of exhaustiveness, this specific literary production 'rende superflue le scritture di tutto ciò che si vede o si dovrebbe vedere, e [...] permette la messa in primo piano – invece – del

¹⁸ See Luca Clerici's 'Notizia sul testo', in Ortese, *Lente*, pp. 467-501.

¹⁹ Crainz, *Storia del miracolo economico*, p. 50.

²⁰ Arbasino has then revised the novel in the later editions of 1967, 1976 and 1993.

²¹ Davide Papotti, 'Il libro in valigia: eredità odeporeiche nel romanzo italiano contemporaneo', *L'Odeporica/Hodoeporics: On Travel Literature*, Special Issue of *Annali d'Italianistica*, 14 (1996), 351-62 (p. 353).

²² Elvio Guagnini, *Il viaggio, lo sguardo, la scrittura* (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2010), p. 5.

soggetto del viaggiatore.²³ Indeed, we shall see later that *Fratelli d'Italia* offers particularly interesting insights into the role and position of the observing eye within travel literature.

This chapter links back to the earlier chapters and reinforces the main argument of the dissertation as a whole, on the one hand, by presenting the complex and uncertain transition of post-war Italy as the trigger that leads the examined writers to explore the country in those years, and, on the other, by examining further the issue of Italy's repressed past, particularly through the theme of the Italian South. Crucially, all of the texts examined in this chapter capture the post-war years as an anxious moment of transition, confirming one of the central premises of this research, which has also informed the analysis in the previous two chapters. Rodighiero claims that, among the books that were published in Italy between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, *Fratelli d'Italia* grasps most effectively the nature of the boom as 'ultimo ballo prima della caduta nel baratro'.²⁴ Indeed, in *Fratelli d'Italia* – whose first edition was published in 1963, that is to say right at the end of the boom period –, the 'euforia mortifera'²⁵ that transpires from the characters' frantic wandering and relentless socialising, suggest that the optimism and confidence that have prevailed in the immediate post-war period have come to an end and Italy is now entering a new phase. Unsurprisingly, death plays a central part in the novel, particularly through the character of Raimondo, one of the chief members of the book's intellectual circle, who is dying from cancer and yet continues until the end to host glamorous parties and cultural events. As we shall see later, Ortese openly discusses the feelings of uncertainty and existential anxiety in her personal life as well as in the historical phase of the country, whereas, in Piovene's *Viaggio in Italia*, the anxiety is more hidden, traceable in the structure of the book and, particularly, in its pretence of completeness.

In the post-war years, many writers commit themselves to documenting the country's changing landscape, to the point that the journey becomes an 'icon' and 'a new cultural image of the country'.²⁶ Another example of documentary that, like Piovene's *Viaggio in Italia*, was produced by the RAI at the end of the 1950s, is provided by the

²³ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁴ Alberto Rodighiero, 'Fratelli d'Italia', *Studi Novecenteschi*, 30.66 (2003), 265-81 (p. 266).

²⁵ Ibid., p. 270.

²⁶ Torriglia, pp. 118-19.

series of reportages written by Mario Soldati from the Po Valley.²⁷ Further textual examples may be Ernesto De Martino's *Il mondo magico* (1948) and *Sud e Magia* (1959), and Rocco Scotellaro's *Contadini del Sud* (1954). While all of these texts certainly add an interesting angle to the study of post-war Italy's transformation through the travel perspective, they are mostly tied to curtailed geographical areas or, as in the case of De Martino, belong to the specific genre of ethnographic reportage. Piovene, Ortese and Arbasino offer three complementary and compelling views of post-war Italy's socio-spatial transformations from their different authorial and gender-specific perspectives, which, in this chapter, are seen as embedded in the historical period under consideration. At the time in which Piovene, Ortese and Arbasino write, Italy has gone through two World Wars and a civil war: a series of events that 'was enough to enhance a sense of disorientation and lack of certainty, to implement a tormenting laceration in the perception of one's sense of identity'.²⁸ It is therefore hard to imagine that the authors examined in this chapter might express an uncritical and somewhat naïve exaltation of Italy's cultural and natural heritage. The same may be said about the optimistic educational mission that generally animates post-unification travellers, even though travel writings of the post-unification and post-war periods share a number of common traits, particularly the sense of national discovery and the emphasis on the regionalisation and differentiation of the country.²⁹ In recording the rapidly transforming geography of post-war Italy from their complementary perspectives, Piovene, Ortese and Arbasino offer interesting insights both in relation to the long-established rhetoric of the *Bel Paese* and to Italy's constitutional fragmentation.

As stated several times in this dissertation, Italy's nation-building process has been problematic and arguably further complicated, in the post-war period, by the apparent inability of Italian society to develop a collective sense of identity and belonging, based on a critical reflection upon the recent past.³⁰ In the context of post-war Italian travel writing, Italy's troubled sense of identity becomes particularly evident

²⁷ Silvana Tamiozzo Goldmann, 'Appunti sul *Viaggio in Italia*', in *Viaggi e Paesaggi di Guido Piovene: Atti del convegno, Venezia-Padova, 24-25 gennaio 2008*, ed. by E. Del Tedesco and A. Zava (Pisa: F. Serra, 2009), pp. 103-22 (p. 119).

²⁸ Torriglia, p. xvii.

²⁹ 'It is interesting to recall here that an analogous phenomenon happened after the unification of the country (1870), with the emergence of a cultural polycentrism, rooted in the history of cities such as Milan, Bologna, Naples, Turin, Trieste, and Catania. This attitude reiterates the strong municipal tendency of Italian culture' (Ibid., p. 203). Italo Calvino has observed that 'l'Italia postrisorgimentale prendeva coscienza della propria diversità interna, con uno spavento proporzionale alle precedenti illusioni unitarie' (Guagnini, p. 39).

³⁰ Minghelli, p. 386.

through the theme of the South as the half of the country that struggles to emerge from poverty. It is worth noting that, until the increased prosperity and mobility of the post-war years open up more opportunities for people to explore the national territory, the vast majority of Italians had travelled very little from one area of the country to the other. Moreover, from the privileged point of view of the North, which is to say the birthplace of the political and cultural elite that had led Italy's unification, the South still looks a remote territory. The 'Southern question', famously theorised by Antonio Gramsci, is arguably placed for the first time in the national spotlight by Ernesto de Martino's ethnographic journeys and by Carlo Levi's best-selling novel *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*.³¹ In the texts examined in this chapter, and particularly in Piovene's *Viaggio in Italia*, the difficult integration process of the South within the unified nation, raises the question of the geographical margins and their representation, and delineates patterns of belonging and exclusion within a new dominant model of modernity.

In what follows, I explore the notion of journey described by the texts as a twofold movement of discovery and self-discovery. On the one hand, I analyse how the authors relate to tropes and stereotyped descriptions, as well as to Italy's historical fragmentation, in the context of the fervid intellectual climate of the post-war years, which are ripe for a critical revisiting of traditional paradigms. On the other, in order to explore the notion of journey as introspective and psychological experience, I examine the positioning of the writers, not only in relation to traditional and accepted ways of seeing Italy, but also to issues of gender and sexuality.

4.2 Guido Piovene's *Viaggio in Italia*

Italian writers have always engaged with the issues of Italy's territorial fragmentation and lack of political unity. Cachey argues that the notion of 'placelessness' has been at the heart of Italian literary tradition, starting with Dante's and Petrarch's vernacular practices, thus explaining the uncertain status of travel writing within the Italian literary canon.³²

³¹ See David Forgacs, *Italy's Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation Since 1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Forgacs examines how De Martino and Levi elaborate their own specific views of the South through a close reading of their writings.

³² Theodore J. Cachey, 'An Italian Literary History of Travel', *L'Odeporica/Hodoeporics: On Travel Literature*, 55-64 (p. 56).

As Cachey puts it, 'the Italian literary canon has no special category for travel simply because the entire tradition comprises a literature of travel, and more precisely a literature of exile/pilgrimage'.³³ Cachey goes on to argue that the history of Italian literature is 'fundamentally Petrarchist', for Petrarch's response to deterritorialisation, based on a cosmopolitan and supranational community of cultivated humanists who speak Latin, fits better the 'subsequent Italian tradition that was designed to overcome' the cultural anxiety relating to the lack of political and territorial cohesion.³⁴ Dante's less conspicuous influence upon the literary canon, on the contrary, may be explained by the fact that his travel writing does not seek to offer a solution to Italy's territorial fragmentation and lack of cohesiveness, but rather confirms it.³⁵ In the context of the post-war years, these issues remain very relevant.

Italy's political unification at the end of the nineteenth century marks the first significant step into the development of the national road network and rail system (albeit with some territorial imbalances), and therefore brings about a mutation in spatial perceptions, especially for those privileged sectors of the population that, at the time, could afford to travel.³⁶ It is, however, the following century and specifically the boom years, that witness the unfolding of a proper revolution in movement, thanks to substantial improvements carried out in the railway and road systems, and to the unprecedented diffusion of cars and motor scooters. These innovations have a dramatic impact on the way in which Italians perceive spaces and distances within the country, which looks closer at hand than ever before. As Ernesto Galli Della Loggia has put it, in those years, spatial proportions mutate and Italy becomes 'smaller'.

Grazie ad una imponente motorizzazione di massa, mutarono anche le proporzioni geografiche del paese. Ricoperta di autostrade e di distributori di benzina, l'Italia si rimpicciolì, e mentre cambiava il senso dello spazio cambiò anche la sua misura.³⁷

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 62-3.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

³⁶ Clerici argues that 'la velocità, una categoria intimamente connessa al successo dei moderni mezzi di locomozione', is a central theme in nineteenth-century Italian travel writing. Clerici refers in particular to De Amicis's *La Carrozza di tutti*, the account of a year of journeys on the horse-drawn tram, the precursor of the modern tram, in Turin, as the example of a text that is able to capture the change in perception, due to the advent of new and faster means of transports (*Viaggiatore*, p. xiii).

³⁷ Torriglia, p. 117.

As mentioned above, domestic travel writing has shown a tendency to document specific areas of the country. More comprehensive approaches taking into account wider portions of the national territory, begin to emerge after the Risorgimento, as a reflection of the curiosity that accompanies the newly born nation, and in response to the improvements in the road system.³⁸ Arguably, the foremost examples of the new quest for discovery – and of the educational mission with which this is often invested – are Abbott Antonio Stoppani’s 1875 book *Il Bel Paese* and the reportages of Edmondo De Amicis.³⁹ Both Abbott Stoppani and De Amicis are, moreover, crucial figures in the development of modern Italian reportage and journalism.⁴⁰ Guagnini argues that 1869 can be established as the birth date of the modern reportage in Italy, for this is the year in which, for the first time, an Italian correspondent sends a dispatch, concerning the inauguration of the Suez Canal.⁴¹ As Guagnini points out, from the second half of the nineteenth century, accounts of scientific expeditions found more space in specialised journals. Moreover, in the newly unified Italian nation, journalism and the publishing industry show an increasing awareness of the international dimension of news coverage, and reportages aimed at a wider public, begin to gain more popularity in the book market.⁴² As it develops, the reportage abandons the strict confines of journalistic enquiry and scientific testimony to embrace a freer narrative style.⁴³ At the same time, domestic travel accounts written by Italian authors flourish in the aftermath of unification.⁴⁴

Guido Piovene distances himself from the trend in Italian travel writing that, by privileging the local and micro, reflects the historical fragmentation of the national territory,⁴⁵ and is arguably closer to post-unification travel writers, whose detailed descriptions of Italy’s diverse landscape betray the great enthusiasm for the new political phase of the unified country.⁴⁶ Similarly, the post-war years, when Italy seems finally on

³⁸ Clerici, *Viaggiatore*, pp. xx-xxi.

³⁹ ‘*Il Bel Paese* aimed to teach of the natural beauty of Italy [...]. The famous *Cuore* taught young people love of country, respect for family and the authorities, and the spirit of sacrifice, brotherhood, and obedience through stories whose protagonists were children from different regional and social backgrounds’ (Valtorta, Hill, and Minghelli, p. 28).

⁴⁰ According to Guagnini, De Amicis represents ‘l’esempio di un tentativo di nuovo approccio al reportage’ (p. 37).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

⁴⁴ Ouditt and Polezzi, p. 101.

⁴⁵ Clerici, *Viaggiatore*, pp. xix-xx.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

the verge of fulfilling its potential as a modern nation, are characterised by new aspirations and ambitions. As Tamiozzo Goldmann has pointed out,

Piovene si inserisce a pieno titolo in quel clima fervido, fatto di curiosità e di voglia di raccontare [...] che aveva caratterizzato gli anni della ricostruzione, della ripresa e del boom economico nel nostro Paese.⁴⁷

The new sense of agency over space does not only involve physical movement, but also the extended knowledge of the country's diverse geography, which is greatly enhanced by the diffusion of mass media communication, and especially television.⁴⁸ It can be said that radio and television partake in an educational endeavour that is, once again, reminiscent of the pedagogic contribution given by post-unification writers to the new-born state and the formation of its citizens, who, historically divided and separated into independent territories, were now confronted with the necessity of thinking of themselves as a single nation. Massimo D'Azeglio's famous quote, stating the necessity of making Italians ('fare gli italiani'), after the unified nation, highlights exactly this issue. A similar educational intent is also present in Piovene's *Viaggio in Italia*, which, as seen, was originally written for Radio RAI.

Indeed, Piovene's endeavour clearly speaks of the need for Italians, in the new economic and intellectual climate, to get to know their own country and make sense of their historical differences, which, in his view, are essentially superficial and therefore cannot lead to proper conflicts and fractures.⁴⁹ As Piovene puts it, 'l'Italia è varia, non complessa' and 'questo spiega perché l'unità dell'Italia, sempre dichiarata precaria, non sia mai stata minacciata,' not even after the Second World War.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Piovene also points out that Italian unity has always lacked a solid moral foundation.⁵¹ This is arguably aggravated by the country's unresolved relation with its past and the amnesiac

⁴⁷ Tamiozzo Goldmann, p. 111.

⁴⁸ As Ginsborg puts it, 'no innovation of these years had a greater effect on everyday life than television. In 1954, in the first year of its introduction, there were 88,000 licence holders, a number which increased to one million in 1958. By 1965 49 per cent of Italian families owned a television set' (p. 240).

⁴⁹ 'Sono però diversità vissute come fatti della natura, che fomentano umori litigiosi ed incomprensioni, ma non conducono al distacco. Meno esiste una vera complessità spirituale: correnti di opinioni convinte e irriducibili, criteri morali fermi ed opposti, conflitti di classe incitati non solo da bisogni e da interessi transitori, ma da valori morali che vogliono elidersi, contrasti importanti di religione' (Piovene, p. 661).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ 'Ma le stesse ragioni che preservano l'unità fisica sono invece d'impedimento all'unità morale, che consiste nell'associazione in vista di un fine comune; e richiede la convinzione pubblica d'essere chiamati a svolgere una funzione storica come popolo. Di fronte a questo genere di chiamate la nostra unità si è mostrata più debole che nel difendere la sua semplice sopravvivenza' (Ibid.).

culture of the post-war years, which has been discussed in Chapter 3. For the sake of consistency with the previous two chapters of this dissertation, in what follows I will refer to Piovene's description of Italy's main industrial cities, Turin and Milan. A further reason for this choice is that the industrial North introduces, by contrast, the theme of the South, on which Piovene dwells at length and which represents a central concern, not only within post-war Italian travel writing, but also, more broadly, in relation to the question of Italian identity. I will, moreover, refer to the chapter that Piovene dedicates to Rome, which occupies a particularly important place in his discourse on post-war Italian society.

While Piovene aims to compile a faithful and coherent survey of post-war Italy's social geography, he is aware that, as in every 'inventory', in *Viaggio in Italia* 'le omissioni, le lacune saltano all'occhio'.⁵² Piovene warns the reader that the book provides a partial angle and reflects the particular moment in which he is writing, for the physical and cultural landscape of the country is changing so rapidly that it would take multiple journeys in the course of the following months and years, to keep the observations up to date. As Piovene notices, 'mentre percorro l'Italia, e scrivo dopo ogni tappa quello che avevo appena visto, la situazione mi cambiava in parte alle spalle'.⁵³ Nevertheless, Piovene's method of 'osservazione episodica' manages to capture the bigger picture and the fundamental processes at stake in Italy in the midst of industrialisation.⁵⁴ For instance, the fact that, albeit diverse and regionalised, Italy is becoming more cohesive and homogeneous.⁵⁵ As Piovene puts it, 'con la sua grande varietà, l'Italia tende a un miscuglio uniforme'.⁵⁶ This may be taken as an example of how *Viaggio in Italia* seeks to challenge anxieties about Italy's constitutional fragmentation and even fears of disintegration, after the disastrous outcome of the Second World War. Piovene detects the symptoms of the new phase of international growth and argues that economic development will level the distinctions between the countries of Europe and areas of Italy. More specifically, he identifies two main ongoing processes that arguably will have the

⁵² Ibid., p. 5.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ 'Avrei potuto compiere un viaggio più rapido, mirando alla situazione di fondo piuttosto che alla descrizione dell'Italia pezzo per pezzo. Questo metodo avrebbe ridotto il valore documentario del libro, ma avrebbe anche portato qualche vantaggio, mettendo in maggior rilievo fatti destinati a disperdersi tra i particolari minuti, o a rimanere relegati in un secondo piano che l'osservazione episodica non poteva raggiungere' (Ibid.).

⁵⁵ For instance, Piovene claims that 'oggi, girando per Roma, si vede come queste antitesi tra una regione e l'altra siano diventate stantie. L'Italia si sta uniformando' (p. 641).

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 666.

effect to both raise Italy's standard of living to the same level as in more advanced European economies and promote a sense of national identity. These processes are, on the one hand, the levelling of the long-standing discrepancies between the North and South of Italy, and, on the other, the evolution of Rome into a modern capital city, able to respond to the needs of the industrialised country.⁵⁷

It is important to note, however, that *Viaggio in Italia* does not provide its 1950s reader with an uncritically optimistic view of the recent socio-economic developments. While Piovene claims that post-war economic expansion has fostered political and moral unity,⁵⁸ he does not fail to acknowledge the contradictions that are shaping the modernisation process in Italy and the obstacles that still remain to be overcome. As an example, he points out the lowering of the average cultural level of the population, which, in Italy, seems inversely proportional to the pace with which social transformations are taking place and is arguably more evident than in other countries.⁵⁹ The analysis that follows shows that *Viaggio in Italia* presents us with a composite picture of post-war Italian society. On the one hand, the editorial operation carried out in the book aims to reconnect the mosaic of the Italian peninsula in an effort that brings to mind the commitment of post-unification writers; on the other, the book does not omit to highlight the controversies and issues that still remain to be solved in the creation of a truly unified and modern nation. Another problematic area concerns the kind of standpoint adopted by Piovene in the book, which, as we shall see, ends up creating new stereotypes while rejecting old ones.

The writers analysed in this chapter occupy specific positions in the dominant discourses of travel and space, as well as gender, of the time period under consideration. Piovene's empirical method of observation and documentarist tone are particularly interesting in terms of the positioning and gaze of the travel writer. The stable perspective from which Piovene observes and judges reality, which belongs to the modernist tradition of travel books that rely on realist conventions, such as the reliability of the observer and

⁵⁷ 'Nell'insieme possiamo dire che in questo dopoguerra sono state intraprese due grandi tappe verso l'unità d'Italia. L'una, appena all'inizio, consiste nel tentativo di pareggiare il Mezzogiorno e il Settentrione sulla base comune del progresso industriale e tecnico; l'altra nel processo che trasforma Roma in una vera capitale moderna riassumendo la nazione intera' (Ibid., p. 640).

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 661-62.

⁵⁹ 'La trasformazione sociale si accompagna in Italia con un abbassamento di cultura maggiore che negli altri Paesi di pari civiltà. È uno degli effetti della corrosione del gracile Stato laico che, nato nel Risorgimento, fu coinvolto in processi storici successivi prima di preparare ad essi un'eredità sicura' (Ibid., pp. 667-68).

stability of travel destinations,⁶⁰ may also be linked to a certain type of male authoritative and supposedly objective gaze. In other words, it may be argued, that Piovene, a Northern male intellectual who has been commissioned by the RAI to travel across Italy and narrate the transformations of the country, identifies himself with objectivity. The fact that Piovene claims for himself a privileged standpoint, becomes particularly evident in the almost colonial tropes that, as will be shown below, he deploys in relation to the Italian South, which, in his view, should adopt the dominant Northern model of progress and civilisation. That being said, *Viaggio in Italia*'s assertive tone and very aim of completeness, as well as the fact that, like other travel accounts of the time, it was commissioned by the RAI, may be in itself revelatory of an underlying anxiety within Italian society, for which Piovene's authoritative and exhaustive guide to the Italian territory should provide a compensation. It should be noted, in passing, that, while *Fratelli d'Italia* also shows an encyclopaedic aspiration, this is of a very different kind, more tied to the book's experimentalism and its representation of the complex nature of the boom period. As Rodighiero has pointed out, Arbasino's 'opera-mondo' ultimately represents an attempt to overcome Neorealism and the traditional boundaries of the Italian literary canon.⁶¹

Piovene's scientific approach gives prominence to what Youngs and Forsdick have identified as the analytical and objective qualities of the reportage, in which the emphasis is put on the observed reality rather than the subjective point of view of the writer. Youngs and Forsdick argue that

[travel writing's] modes oscillate around the usually distinct fields of autobiography and science. The former lends to travel writing its subjective qualities centred on the character of the narrator and his or her interactions with the people and landscapes that are encountered. The scientific aspect gives to travel writing its objective quality of observation and reportage. The autobiographical draws also on the construction of the

⁶⁰ Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, 'Postmodern Itineraries', in *Travel Writing: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by T. Youngs and C. Forsdick (London: Routledge, 2012), vol. 2, pp. 489-509 (p. 490).

⁶¹ Rodighiero, p. 271.

protagonist in the novel (especially the picaresque and the comic), which helps introduce elements of the fictional.⁶²

The extract highlights the varying shades and styles of travel literature. On the one hand, the sphere of objectivity, which stems from the scientific approach to reality, typical in reportage, and, on the other, that of subjectivity, which depends on the degree of involvement of the author in the narrated facts and is generally signalled by the presence of autobiographical and fictional elements. Generally speaking, the position of the writer remains crucial in travel literature for, contrary to other forms of writing, travel accounts do not follow a plot, but rather maintain the narrative voice as their focal point. In this regard, Rossi and Papotti argue that ‘la predisposizione mentale del viaggiatore è centrale per “colorare” il tono del viaggio stesso e, conseguentemente, della narrazione verbale che ne può seguire’.⁶³ In *Viaggio in Italia*, Piovene champions the value of objectivity, but, at the same time, offers his personal opinions throughout the book, showing his involvement in the narrated facts. As a result, while the book problematises the image of the country based on literary conventions and the modern tourist experience, it also creates new stereotypes. As stated above, these contradictions may be attributed to the kind of superior viewpoint adopted by Piovene, which, in aiming to offer a comprehensive and somewhat reassuring guide to post-war Italian society and territory, reflects the existential uncertainty of the period in which the book was written.

Despite acknowledging that some issues still remain unsolved, *Viaggio in Italia* ultimately seeks to demonstrate that Italy’s unification process has taken a significant step forward in the post-war period. The fact that *Viaggio in Italia* remains a fairly isolated case in the panorama of Italian travel writing, in terms of completeness and accuracy, may however confirm that this process is not yet accomplished in those years, for the tendency shown by domestic travel accounts to concentrate on specific regions still prevails. Moreover, the observations that, in *Viaggio in Italia*, support the thesis of Italy’s increased uniformity and unity, seem partly at odds with the content of the book itself, which ‘coglie distinzioni che bastano da sole a inquadrare un popolo.’⁶⁴ Indeed, *Viaggio in Italia* crystallises the cultural identity of people and places through accurate and

⁶² Tim Youngs and Charles Forsdick, ‘Introduction: Travel Writing As a Genre’, in *Travel Writing*, ed. by Youngs and Forsdick, vol. 1, pp. 1-24 (p. 1).

⁶³ Luisa Rossi and Davide Papotti (eds), ‘Introduzione: il viaggio come caleidoscopio’, in *Alla fine del viaggio*, ed. by L. Rossi and D. Papotti (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2006), pp. 11-16 (p. 12).

⁶⁴ Tamiozzo Goldmann, p. 103.

somewhat reifying descriptions, which emphasise their peculiar traits. Thus, the typical Milanese ‘ama l’ufficio con calore sentimentale’,⁶⁵ while the Turinese, at first glance serious and austere, is actually a non-conformist, inclined towards unconventional political positions. The latter’s peculiar character fits perfectly the city of Turin, which Piovene describes as ‘la più ibrida delle città italiane’.⁶⁶ Piovene’s journey across Italy is therefore populated by *caratteri* and *maschere*, seen through the author’s objectifying eye. A further example is provided by the clerk, the predominant professional figure in both Milan and Turin, but with very distinct attributes between the two cities.⁶⁷ In the long and fairly amusing description that Piovene gives of the Roman people, these are presented as ‘una realtà molto concreta e irriducibile’.⁶⁸ The Roman citizen is, indeed, described as ‘essere contraddittorio [...] incarnato nella sua città, di cui decanta la bellezza, e insieme indifferente a questa bellezza; considera la città eterna, ma per sé, non per gli aspetti che la rivestono; ritiene tutto transitorio, e stabile Roma sola’.⁶⁹ The economic, political and social institutions of a city, and its inhabitants with their peculiar anthropological traits, therefore concur to shape an urban microcosm with a very specific identity. A further example of this interaction is provided by Fiat, Italy’s leading automotive industry based in Turin, which Piovene describes as ‘un frutto ingigantito della intelligenza torinese di punta.’⁷⁰ Fiat, argues Piovene, could only have prospered in Turin, since

l’industria delle fuori serie rientra nel panorama rigido, modesto, economico e insieme pompaduresco della città. Una città, come dicevo, severa e rococò, metà dei ragionieri e metà dei sarti.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Piovene, *Viaggio*, p. 84.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 135. It is worth quoting the description at length: ‘I torinesi sono anche lenti, pesanti, riflessivi, ragioniereschi, alieni dai gesti e dalle astrazioni, resistenti alle opinioni altrui, avari di consensi e, se provano ammirazione, portati a tenerla per sé piuttosto che a manifestarla in applausi; gli unici italiani forse che possiedono più opinioni che idee, in un Paese come il nostro, nel quale le idee sono folte ma le opinioni rade. [...] Il carattere ibrido (mai falso), si riflette nell’aspetto della città, le dà una speciale attrattiva di scatola cinese che nessun’altra città italiana possiede’ (*Ibid.*, p. 136).

⁶⁷ ‘Anche a Torino la figura predominante è il ragioniere, ma un ragioniere ben diverso dal suo pendant d’oltre Ticino. È famoso per le economie di elettricità e di carta, recalcitrante ai rischi, dominato dal culto del bilancio, appassionato delle piccole somme. [...] può darsi che stia dipingendo una maschera un po’ antiquata, ma anche nei nuovi (e ne ho conosciuti parecchi) il fondo rimane così’ (*Ibid.*, p. 137).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 648.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 641.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

At the other end of the country, lies the starkly different reality of the South. It may be argued that, as a geographical and anthropological entity, the Italian South is fully discovered in the post-war period, especially through De Martino's ethnographic journeys, which 'bring[s] north and south closer to one another',⁷² and thanks to the state's effort to incorporate the whole country into the new economic and historical phase, as had also been the case after the unification. Minghelli observes that the concept of remorse has gained prominence in the context of the post-war exploration of the national territory, and specifically of its Southern margins, since 'the rush to chronicle and emancipate the South [...] emerges as an unconscious journey for the modern "north" in search of healing'.⁷³ In other words, the new critical concept of travel that emerges in the post-war years offers an opportunity to reflect on the prosperity of the North as a reflection of the fact that, since the unification, the latter has become established as the powerful centre of the country, while the South has received little attention in the process of political decision-making. While some post-war Italian intellectuals may see reportage as a form of redemption, however, *Viaggio in Italia* actually represents a clear stand in favour of a certain idea of modernity and future for Italy, which requires 'a moral migration'⁷⁴ of the old South. In other words, it requires rendering the South and the North more alike, in the name of economic progress. Piovene registers a separation between the old and modern South, and argues that the latter is destined to prevail. The 'colore meridionale', that is, the archaic culture of the old South, represents a burden, whose dismissal Piovene sees as inevitable and openly champions, criticising, instead, those 'scrittori e giornalisti che scendono nel Sud per cercarvi il colore locale'.⁷⁵ Such claims can be related again to Piovene's 'commission' to produce his reportage by the national broadcaster RAI at this particular moment, in which the Italian state has every reason to show an image of the country as unified in the march towards progress.

Un nuovo Sud si va formando dunque sul vecchio Sud, e il vecchio, stanco di se stesso, vi emigra. Si assiste a un fenomeno non dissimile di quando le masse emigravano nelle comunità dall'altra parte dell'Oceano. Oggi l'emigrazione è *in loco*.⁷⁶

⁷² Minghelli, p. 397.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 398.

⁷⁴ Piovene, p. 664.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 663-64.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 664.

If we take the example of Sicily, which, according to Piovene, embodies more evidently the contradictions that exist in the South as a whole, we can immediately identify some recurring tropes in Piovene's discourse on the Italian South. Piovene detects the gradual appearance, in post-war Sicily, of a Northern-like attitude toward progress and innovation, which nevertheless struggles to prevail against the 'decadenza dell'antico' that still bears on those territories.⁷⁷ Moreover, when acknowledging the emergence of a more dynamic spirit and work ethic amongst the younger generation, Piovene adopts a somewhat patronising attitude toward Southern (and, specifically, Sicilian) people. For instance, he claims that 'la Sicilia di oggi assomiglia a un adolescente, la cui vitalità porta l'improvvisato ed il meditato, il lavoro utile e lo sperpero, il metodo e il disordine'.⁷⁸ Piovene's discourse on the South is shaped by dichotomies and oppositions, such as centre-periphery and traditional-modern, as shown, for instance, by the following example.

Tutti i contrasti del Mezzogiorno italiano, in questa fase di trapasso, appaiono qui stridenti. Da un lato il sogno dell'industria, l'attivismo tecnico, l'impulso turistico ed archeologico, lo slancio verso il settentrione e l'Europa; dall'altro la città e i villaggi stipati, dove anche il palazzo del signore è ingoiato dalle casupole, le petraie deserte, la brulicante povertà di alcuni quartieri palermitani, dei paesi gialli dello zolfo, del bracciantato di Ragusa.⁷⁹

The opposition between industrial dynamism and the burden of extreme poverty, in the above extract, ultimately shows how, in *Viaggio in Italia*, the Italian South is associated with ideas of exoticism and, especially, immobilism, as if only some force from the outside could activate those productive energies that now lie dormant. When compared with the rhetoric of the Grand Tour, Piovene tends to lean more towards the exaltation of modernity against the value of the past, even though he does not fail to take notice of architectural and natural beauties, and therefore to recognise that, to the external and neutral observer, Sicily must appear simply as 'una tra le più belle terre del mondo'.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 455.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 455-56.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 505.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Let us now move on to what we have described as the stereotype of the *Bel Paese*. In Piovene's view, the romanticising ('classico e umanistico')⁸¹ imagery that, in the tradition of the journey to Italy, has been attached to places, hampers the development of Italy into a modern European nation, which arguably represents the book's main concern. In *Viaggio in Italia*'s encyclopaedic reach, all places are worthy of attention and there is no hierarchy based on the alleged primacy of Romantic landscapes or *città d'arte*. Quite to the contrary, the 'bellezza sigillata' of certain Italian cities is seen by Piovene as 'limite', 'prigione' and 'perfezione conclusa che talvolta condanna alla sterilità'.⁸² Milan as a city that has constantly transformed and reinvented itself, a city whose history is never concluded, is seen, instead, as conveying a sense of vitality and energy. This may be extended to the whole region of Lombardy, which is beautiful, but in a discreet and secret way: 'meno esemplare, meno italiana, per lo straniero che avvicina l'Italia e la vuole conoscere nei suoi paesaggi resi tipici dalle convenzioni turistiche'. For this reason, writes Piovene, 'l'amiamo d'un amore più libero.'⁸³ The chapter on Rome opens with a similar declaration of intent, as Piovene states: 'rinuncio a descrivere metodicamente rovine, basiliche, giardini, piazze, strade, musei ed a mettermi in gara con alcune decine o centinaia di migliaia di scrittori illustri ed oscuri. Sarebbe superfluo e ridicolo'.⁸⁴ Thus, we can see that Piovene openly rejects established conventions of representation: for instance, the fact that Lombardy is not typically Italian is seen as a value. Once again, Piovene deconstructs some of the most enduring commonplaces associated with Italy, while nevertheless maintaining a reifying eye.

The Grand Tour assigned special importance to the traditional *città d'arte*, which is to say, chiefly, Rome, Venice, Florence and Naples, and, like Piovene in his *Viaggio in Italia*, generally followed a North-to-South itinerary. As we shall see later, Piovene's methodical approach to travel and travel writing, is very different from both the one adopted by Ortese, whose journeys are often dictated by the contingencies of the moment and the volatility of mood swings, and Arbasino, who provides a rewriting of the classic Grand Tour, in which the emphasis is put on the international dimension and improvised nature of the itineraries followed by the characters. Nevertheless, Piovene introduces an element of originality in documenting the complexity of the Italian territory far beyond

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 664.

⁸² Ibid., p. 74.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 73.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 639.

the official itineraries of the Grand Tour, which tended to privilege specific places, especially within the same epoch and among groups of travellers coming from the same country.⁸⁵ In so doing, Piovene recognises equal dignity to all places within Italy. We have seen, for example, that he praises Milan, which generally tended to be overlooked by the Grand Tour travellers who, at most, passed it (and Turin) hastily and with little interest.⁸⁶

The chapter dedicated to Rome – a city that, as capital of the country and archetypal *città eterna*, arguably condenses better than any other the cliché of the *Bel Paese* – provides a further example of this tendency to deconstruct accepted ways of representation, and contains interesting reflections on the difficulties of integrating a city with such an important history and tradition, and unique identity, into the project of the unified nation.⁸⁷ In this chapter, Piovene further criticises the cult of the past, stressing once again that it represents a hindrance for the modernisation process. He observes that ‘il sogno della romanità e dell’impero fu tra i moventi retorici che condussero l’Italia al maggiore disastro’,⁸⁸ but also points out that the Second World War has destroyed the myth of the Roman civilisation, triggering the process that will eventually transform Rome into a ‘città internazionale’, ‘non interamente europea, come Londra e Parigi, ma la grande metropoli con caratteri misti, tra l’Europa e il Mediterraneo’.⁸⁹ In this regard, Piovene’s progressivism can also be measured against the widely shared idea of immigration as a plague for the receiving city, connected with notions of poverty and lack of social integration. On the contrary, Piovene sees immigration as a resource in terms of the renewal of Rome’s decadent society.

L’affluenza degli stranieri, non soltanto contemplativi, le dà un carattere cosmopolita di nuova specie; l’irruzione degli italiani da tutte le province sopravanza la vecchia società romana, popolare, borghese e aristocratica.

⁸⁵ <http://grandtour.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/racconto/come-si-viaggiava/itinerari> [accessed 14 August 2017].

⁸⁶ <http://grandtour.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/racconto/come-si-viaggiava/itinerari/tappe/un-viaggio-tipo> [accessed 14 August 2017].

⁸⁷ ‘Tra i motivi per cui, quasi un secolo fa, alcuni si rammaricarono che Roma divenisse capitale d’Italia, scartati quelli frivoli e contingenti, si può isolarne uno più serio. Roma, fu detto, è troppo grande ed universale, troppo grave di storia, per essere la capitale di una nazione singola di grandezza media. Roma capitale sarà per le spalle degli italiani un fardello troppo pesante. Li fisserà a un passato scomparso, ostacolando lo sviluppo della nazione nuova’ (Piovene, p. 639).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 640.

Si compie così a Roma, con ritmo sempre più veloce, una fusione della società italiana.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, the fact that Piovene chooses an authoritative point of view also means that he is not immune from some of the essentialist arguments that have shaped the discourse on immigration and urbanism. For instance, he calls ‘muffe’ the *borgate* that have developed during the Fascist period and supports the idea of ‘trasformazione controllata’, against the chaotic growth that Rome has undergone in the post-war years.⁹¹ In so doing, he ultimately endorses traditionalist conceptions of urbanism, such as the centre–periphery dualism, that is to say the idea that the ‘real’ city coincides with its walled, older core, as opposed to the bleakness of suburban developments.⁹²

Viaggio in Italia ultimately suggests that, if the obstacles to the processes of modernisation and nation building will effectively be tackled and overcome, Italy is bound to find its own place in the project of a unified, modern Europe, together with more developed countries. Piovene’s analytical approach challenges contemplative and ‘archeologising’ attitudes relating to Italy and its past, by documenting the country’s differences and variations in all their complexity. At the same time, however, the book shapes new stereotypes: a reflection of the objective point of view of the male intellectual who establishes the cultural essence of the places visited and of their population. A stable viewpoint that, as has been argued, betrays an underlying cultural anxiety, which nonetheless emerges from the very encyclopaedic structure of the book and its pretence of exhaustiveness.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 642-43.

⁹² ‘La trasformazione di Roma da semplice città in metropoli, avvenimento inevitabile nella storia dell’unità, è stata troppo repentina, e continua in maniera troppo rapida, per non prendere aspetti critici. Talvolta nella Roma d’oggi sembra che un giro vorticoso associ un’antica città ed una nuova metropoli brasiliana, le cui immagini si sovrappongono nell’occhio troppo lento per separarle. [...] I quartieri suburbani dilagano a vista d’occhio, irti di case basse ed alte, diritte e a sghimbescio. Ma purtroppo il fenomeno di prepotente efflorescenza non si ferma ai suburbi’ (Ibid., pp. 640-41).

4.3 Anna Maria Ortese's *La lente scura*

With Ortese's *La lente scura*, we move on to an altogether different level, for the book contains descriptions of places that are not only diverse, but also seemingly disconnected from each other.⁹³ The very structure of the book differs radically from that of *Viaggio in Italia*, consisting of three chronological sections that include articles that were written at different periods of Ortese's life and that focus on various areas of Italy. This privileging of temporality over spatiality, or at least, spatial coherence, is particularly indicative of Ortese's subjectifying the national space. We can see from the very beginning that, in challenging conventional understandings of regions or places within Italy as defined by their contiguities, *La lente scura* outlines a micro-historical and micro-geographical method, in contrast with Piovene's macro approach. On the human plane, this fragmentation and attention to the micro is reflected by the presence of emblematic and solitary figures who have devoted their life to one cause, for which they are now fighting alone. These are historical figures, such as the Catholic priests Don Milani and Don Zeno Saltini, founder of Nomadelfia, a Catholic community that welcomed abandoned children and 'parents of vocations',⁹⁴ and the Sicilian bandit Salvatore Giuliano, who attained notoriety after the war. Ortese suggests that their solitary battles represent a struggle for auto-determination and an alternative project to the precarious cohesion offered by post-war Italian society. This idea is well represented in the description of Don Milani, who 'sorrideva appena, col suo pensieroso disprezzo, e insieme una nobiltà assoluta, ch'era quella di un'altra Italia'.⁹⁵ The example of Giuliano poses a proper challenge to the idea of Italian state, for the bandit was a central figure in the Movement for the Independence of Sicily.⁹⁶ In the 'dopoguerra subito privo di unità e memoria'⁹⁷ that Ortese portrays, we do not find an idea of totality and cohesiveness, nor do we detect a unifying principle. On the contrary, we find textual and intra-textual thresholds. The river Po, for instance, is described as a 'strada schiumosa e potente che divide l'Italia in due',⁹⁸ a boundary that

⁹³ For instance, in relation to Genova, Ortese writes: 'osservavo quietamente Genova, riflettevo a cosa somigliava e a cosa non somigliava. E sempre più mi pareva che di strettamente legato al resto dell'Italia non avesse nulla' (p. 114).

⁹⁴ <http://www.nomadelfia.it/eng/what-is-nomadelfia.html> [accessed 11 September 2017].

⁹⁵ Ortese, *Lente*, p. 139.

⁹⁶ See for instance Billy J. Chandler, *King of the Mountain: The Life and Death of Giuliano the Bandit* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988).

⁹⁷ Ortese, *Lente*, p. 452.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

can be crossed in one direction or the other, each time with the impression of entering a different country. In the chapter ‘Inglese a Roma’, the North evokes feelings of safety and domesticity to Ortese who is crossing the Po on a train, heading to Rome, while the South is ‘agitato Mediterraneo’,⁹⁹ chaos and unpredictability. Ortese is aware that her anxious mood on this occasion, may be due to the fact that, having been born in Rome, she is afraid of the emotional backlash of going back, when she does not yet feel settled in the North. North to which, interestingly enough, she refers as ‘estero’.¹⁰⁰

As was noted in relation to Piovene, Ortese too rejects superficial and standardised approaches to travel and travel writing. She experiences travelling as a restless quest, in which the aspiration to know and understand the places visited, let alone feel at home in any of them, is often frustrated. The impossibility of inhabiting a place as a tourist may also speak of a historical anxiety, specific to the Italy of those years, which still appears a foreign land to the many people who have hardly had any chance to travel through the country, before transport infrastructures are widely improved and the advent of mass media communication changes dramatically the perception of the Italian territory and geography through documentaries, reportages and travel-inspired programmes. Ortese suggests that the tourist experience betrays a paradox, for only when the tourist identity falls (Ortese fantasises that this may happen if the tourist were to be mistaken by local people for someone else, a relative or an acquaintance) does it become possible to challenge the sense of estrangement that arises from the unfamiliarity of people and places, therefore coming closer to understanding them.

In una città, come nel mare, bisogna identificarsi, per vedere realmente. Bisogna che qualcuno si dimentichi per quale motivo siete venuto, e vi confonda con un familiare. Allora, mille particolari segreti vengono alla superficie, e in quei particolari si ricompone anche per voi il volto sfaccettato della città, si ricompone in un’immagine unica.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ ‘La sola idea di un viaggio a Roma mi riempiva di spavento. [...] Veri attacchi di nevrosi, non giustificati per altro da nessuna ragione apprezzabile – ché anzi portavo della capitale un ricordo affettuoso e piacevole – ma piuttosto – così fantasticavo – da quel senso di un ritorno “indietro”, implicito in qualsiasi viaggio verso i luoghi di origine di quegli emigrati che ancora non hanno salde radici all’estero, e che sospettano eternamente di essere rispediti a casa’ (Ibid., p. 43).

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 330.

What Ortese is saying here is that one could try to really understand a place and its inhabitants, only by immersing oneself in the life of a community and becoming an integral part of it. Intriguingly, the same idea represents one of the founding principles of modern cultural anthropology, whose methodology stems from the process of critical self-interrogation of methods and practices that anthropologists undergo after the end of colonialism, when it becomes manifest that ethnology as a discipline had been at the service of the imperial powers.¹⁰² The same principle also informs Ernesto De Martino's methods and his ethnographic enquiries, which, as seen, arguably mark the most important step towards an understanding of the long-standing issues of the Italian South within the socio-historical context of the whole country.

Ortese offers us a window into her inner world and, in so doing, into the connection between travel and self-discovery, in the introductory and concluding reflections that she includes in *La lente scura*, where she recollects the years in which, in the course of her numerous trips across Italy, the idea of the book started to take shape. The structure and content of *La lente scura*, which are intentionally fragmentary and variegated, mirror, on the one hand, Italy's strong differentiation and, on the other, Ortese's uncertain emotional state of the time, revealing how external and internal perspectives intertwine throughout the book. *La lente scura* includes travel pieces 'tanto dissimili e perfino contrastanti tra loro',¹⁰³ which Ortese mostly published as newspaper articles from the second half of the 1940s to the early 1960s.

Nel periodo compreso tra gli anni '48 e '62, ma anche un po' prima e anche un po' dopo, mi accadde di prendere una quantità di treni, scendere in molte stazioni all'alba, e ripartire ancora di notte, barcollando per la stanchezza, senza sapere precisamente dove avrei riposato il giorno successivo.¹⁰⁴

Given what has been said above about Piovene's use of an authoritative authorial voice, it becomes immediately evident that Ortese describes a more fearful and even destabilising idea of travel, where the common thread seems to be the sense of absence,

¹⁰² Forgacs, *Italy's Margins*, p. 141.

¹⁰³ Ortese, *Lente*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

which the act of travelling cannot heal completely and that perhaps ultimately exacerbates.

Non auguro a nessuna persona giovane e vagamente ‘dissociata’ come io ero, e inoltre priva di reddito e anche di minime certezze personali e professionali – di attraversare l’Italia in un dopoguerra subito privo di unità e memoria – come io l’attraversai. C’è da uscirne spezzati. Tutto vi sembra estraneo, meraviglioso e spietato insieme: siete in casa d’altri! [...] vidi Roma, o altre città, come appunto le vidi: straniere, accese, inesplicabili!¹⁰⁵

Ortese describes her younger self as vulnerable, somewhat detached from reality, and lacking personal and economic stability. More importantly, the realities that she encounters in her journeys appear foreign and even hostile.

Ortese is aware that what she writes is to a large extent influenced by her own anxious filter on reality. In her own words, ‘le cose viste – uomini e paesi – le ho viste sempre deformate dalla sofferenza, dall’ansia, come da veloci illusioni di tregue e riposi’.¹⁰⁶ *Lente scura* is the name that Ortese chooses to describe this filter (and the same name that, of course, also provides the title of the book): a lens that is ‘di continuo allontanata e ravvicinata alle cose’.¹⁰⁷ She describes the *lente scura* as a blend of ‘malinconia e protesta’,¹⁰⁸ where melancholy may be a reflection of Ortese’s personality and arguably of the personal difficulties that she was experiencing at the time, while protest hints at alternative ways of narrating the observed reality. The unstable *dopoguerra* depicted by Ortese through her *lente scura*, therefore overlaps with her inner experience and becomes its symbolic equivalent. As she puts it,

Chiaro che il ‘disastro’ era mio. Ma anche vero che le situazioni di disastro, quando così tanto prolungate, possono suggerire il sospetto – dico almeno il sospetto – di un corrispettivo disastro del tempo ‘umano’, non sempre visibile – come da un treno in corsa un paesaggio – intorno al protagonista.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 452.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 451.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 451.

This anxious condition is certainly amplified by Ortese's being a female journalist and travel writer in years in which women's emancipation and the feminist movement had yet to develop in Italy. It may be useful at this point to refer to Sara Mills's study on women's travel writing in the British colonies. In particular, Mills notices that because of the way the dominant discourse of femininity was constructed over that period of time, women travel writers found it more difficult to employ the 'imperialist voice' in their writings than their male counterparts. Colonialism was indeed much about reasserting a certain idea of masculine British identity, in accordance with the values of politico-military power and physical force; accordingly, in the colonial discourse, feminine identity was generally associated with traditional values and particularly the domestic sphere of the home.¹¹⁰ Travel accounts written by women therefore 'tended to be more tentative than male writing, less able to assert the "truths" of British rule without qualification.'¹¹¹ A similar situation may apply to Italian women, who, in the post-war period, still retain a fairly marginal position within Italian society. The condition of being a female journalist in 1950s Italy is therefore very important to explain both the feelings of uncertainty and uneasiness that accompany Ortese in her journeys and, arguably, her financial difficulties. Indeed, as a woman, she most likely had to struggle to obtain professional recognition in years in which Italy was transforming itself into an industrialised country, attracting more women into the labour force, but the process of women's emancipation from the domestic roles of mothers and wives, had only just begun.¹¹² It should be noted, moreover, that since the Grand Tour and before the advent of mass tourism in more recent times, travel had overwhelmingly been the prerogative of the young wealthy male.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Hellman points out that 'when feminism emerged in the early 1970s, it was both an outgrowth of and a response to a complex of radical social and economic changes that had already gone a long way toward transforming Italy into a modernized, industrialized and secular country much like its Western European neighbors'. Judith A. Hellman, *Journeys Among Women: Feminism in Five Italian Cities* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), p. 1.

¹¹³ Black, p. 5. See also Susan Bassnett, 'Travel Writing and Gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by P. Hulme and T. Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 225-42.

Sharon Wood too has observed that Ortese's travel writings bring to the fore feelings of existential uneasiness and not being at home in any place.¹¹⁴ As Wood puts it,

Ortese wanders over Italy and beyond in an effort to allay anxiety, to recover a sense of self long lost, to repair an alienated relationship with the world, and in this sense travelling and writing share a common function, which is to restore a sense of belonging, to minister to an irremediable sense of loss.¹¹⁵

While the book is ultimately the account of loss and absence, and the search for something that seems to be always slightly out of reach, it is also true, as Wood suggests, that Ortese does not go through the post-war years passively, languishing in uncertainty, but actively seeks to heal the personal and historical fracture through her travel writing. Moreover, Ortese is able to see the possibilities and great promise that the historical transition brings with it. In her own words,

Non saprei dire che animo e che aspetto avessi allora. [...] L'Italia era ancora molto povera, non offriva una vita facile. Tuttavia questa vita era simile a un campo pieno di confuse, grandiose possibilità; e la speranza – e il rischio – bastavano.¹¹⁶

This is perhaps the real key to reading the book, as a document of a rather complex period of recent Italian history, characterised by a mood of mingled hope and anxiety. For Ortese, travelling becomes a way to fully embrace these contradictions, challenging preconceived ideas and searching for alternative narratives, where her gender-specific perspective is once again all the more revealing. In regard to Ortese's travel accounts, Della Coletta has talked about a type of 'nomadismo intellettuale', which together with Ortese's feminine writing, challenges dominant models and representations.¹¹⁷

Indeed, Ortese's flexible and sympathetic gaze opens up the possibility for alternative discourses, other than the kind of superior viewpoint adopted by Piovene in *Viaggio in Italia*. In so doing, Ortese effectively disassembles stereotypes. Talking about

¹¹⁴ Sharon Wood, 'Strange Euphorias and Promised Lands: The Travel Writing of Anna Maria Ortese', in *Literature and Travel*, ed. by M. Hanne (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), pp. 181-92 (p. 182).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹¹⁶ Ortese, *Lente*, p. 15.

¹¹⁷ Della Coletta, p. 383.

Genoa, for instance, she points out that the sky of the city ‘non è molto italiano, non è ardente come ce lo dànno le cartoline illustrate, ma neppure vuoto come il cielo della Val Padana’.¹¹⁸ Similarly, she observes that Genoa’s ‘famoso mare azzurro e pieno di bandiere’ does not exist in reality.¹¹⁹ Only when these stereotypical characterisations have been abandoned, the reader is able to understand and fully appreciate the unique character of the city: ‘ma pur essendo metallico il cielo, e remoto il mare, si sentiva la loro grandezza e libertà, il loro fiato, e i genovesi mi sembravano uscire da quella nobile aria.’¹²⁰ It is arguably not by chance that, as will also be discussed again later, Ortese chooses Liguria and Genoa, a frontier and port city, traditionally open toward the influx of various cultures, to talk about her own feelings of estrangement, but also of a certain air of nobility that cannot always be felt elsewhere in Italy.

La lente scura proves particularly relevant in the context of this research, which explores, through perceptions of space, existential anxiety as one of the defining themes of the boom era. Indeed, the book describes a kind of fractured modernity in which the fracture is historical as well as geographical. In the course of her journeys, Ortese constantly laments the presence of absence. As she puts it: ‘cercavo qualcosa, strade e case, in cui riconoscermi e riposarmi; e questo qualcosa non c’era più’.¹²¹ Ortese is never celebratory toward a past that has witnessed horrors and tragedies – pretty much as she never praises uncritically the beauty of the landscape, in which she tends to detect something ineffable and even sinister – but, at the same time, she does not seem to fit into the idea of modernity that is taking hold in post-war Italy. In this respect, Piovene distances himself from both Ortese and Arbasino, for he is far more inclined to note the encouraging signs of the new socio-economic situation and therefore to dismiss conservative attitudes toward progress as obstacles to the creation of Italy as a modern nation, which should develop along the lines of its European neighbours. As we have seen, however, while Piovene adopts a more optimistic stance, he does not fail to recognise the contradictions that Italian society still faces on the eve of the economic boom. As has been suggested, moreover, *Viaggio in Italia* may be seen as a sort of guidebook, born out of the need to alleviate widespread uncertainty, which also informs

¹¹⁸ Ortese, *Lente*, p. 114.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 452.

Ortese's writing, about the integration and future of Italy, in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The themes of silence and incommunicability, central to Ortese's prose, speak of this underlying uncertainty.¹²² The encounter with places and the people who inhabit them, often provides the occasion for these feelings to emerge into the written page. In the following passage, for instance, Ortese describes the common situation of holding a conversation with fellow train passengers during one of her frequent journeys: after exchanging some information about themselves and their places of origin, they are left with a feeling of bewilderment and the idea that places and the existences that populated them, inevitably bear different meanings to different people.

Ogni volta che sono in treno, qualcuno mi racconta la sua vita; qualche volta, io racconto la mia [...]. Benché le storie di questi uomini e queste donne mi spieghino stranamente i paesi da cui essi provengono, o che attraversiamo, l'impressione finale è sempre di smarrimento, come dopo aver fissato un muto cielo stellato.¹²³

The sense of estrangement transmitted by the places and landscapes through which Ortese is travelling, is amplified by their own natural beauty, which is almost intimidating and somewhat uncanny. For instance, Ortese claims that a place like the Ligurian Riviera can be contemplated, but not inhabited. Only the rich who have sufficient money, and perhaps conceit, to settle there, seem not to be afraid of spoiling that beauty.

Tutta questa bellezza, toccando la perfezione delle cose pensate, mi sembra inabitabile. E forse, sotto questo aspetto, è anche comprensibile perché sia diventata preda dell'infinita avidità e disponibilità dei ricchi, disponibilità di mezzi e di aggressione.¹²⁴

It is important to note that the above description has strong gendered connotations, emphasising the urge to dominate and possess. The final phrase, in particular, seems to recall the memory of war and colonisation, hinting at the use of military force and

¹²² See also the already mentioned *Silenzio a Milano* by Ortese.

¹²³ Ortese, *Lente*, p. 347.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

technology to control what is identified as wild, natural and rich in resources that can be exploited.

The Ligurian landscape, so pretty and perfectly arranged, seems implausible and elicits once again feelings of alienation and incommunicability.

Non avevo avvertito, in altre esperienze di viaggio, la sensazione di estraneità che può dare la Liguria. [...] Ma l'estraneità rimane, e trova le sue origini nell'assurdità di questa bellezza, nella sua perfezione e incomunicabilità assolutamente al di fuori dell'umano.¹²⁵

It can be argued that here the trope of the *Bel Paese* is reversed and relegated by Ortese to a more disquieting dimension, distant from the reassuring descriptions that had generally dominated the writings of foreign travellers. This operation is further corroborated by the emphasis that Ortese puts on the unkind nature – ‘spettrale, arida, sassosa’¹²⁶– that characterises in particular Southern Italy and which becomes a metaphor of the straitened living conditions in those territories.¹²⁷ Following what has been said above, this kind of wild, uncontrollable nature can also be seen as articulating a resistance to domination and possession.

The above extracts from the book, fall within the broader issue that is raised within the same chapter, ‘Viaggio in Liguria’, concerning the rise of consumerism in post-war Italy and the ongoing process of marketisation of the national territory. The ex-sailor Alessi, whom Ortese meets in Santa Margherita, Liguria, is assigned the role of introducing this theme. With his heightened sensitivity and perception of reality, Alessi may be regarded as a sort of alter-ego of the author. He has lived abroad for thirty years and now that he has returned to his birthplace in Liguria, he feels uprooted. As Ortese comments, ‘non ha più radici né orizzonte.’¹²⁸ From Alessi’s fragmentary account, we

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 350.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 144.

¹²⁷ Further examples of how, in *La lente scura*, nature is perceived as *matrigna*, and notions of silence and death are applied to the descriptions of the natural landscape, may be: ‘Il 25 dicembre dell’anno seguente non sembrava Natale; alle due del pomeriggio ero sul treno Firenze–Pistoia. Vuoto, deserto, come tutta l’Italia che avevo attraversata. [...] Anche qui, nell’aria di primavera, un silenzio di morte’ (p. 133); ‘Non avevamo alcuna prevenzione, tutt’altro, verso il paesaggio toscano, ma esso, quella mattina, fosse effetto del tempo o di una nostra cattiva disposizione fisica che alterava l’esatta misura delle cose, ci parve più profondo e pericoloso e morto di quanto in realtà non fosse’ (pp. 142-43); ‘E allora scoppiava un grido che sembrava di festa, ma dietro gli rimbalzavano echi di uno stupore non più lieto, desolato come quel deserto’ (p. 153).

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 356.

understand that he has gone through a traumatic event, while out at sea, which is still tormenting him. As both an outsider and insider, he is a privileged observer of post-war Italian society. He comments that ‘hanno affittato e venduto tutto, anche le voci’,¹²⁹ suggesting, as Wood claims, that ‘with the boom Italy has sold not only her land, she seems to have sold her soul.’¹³⁰ It is also worth noticing the presence of the theme of appropriation or denial of voice, which, as mentioned, is a central thread in Ortese’s work and adds once again a distinctly feminist charge to these representations. Interestingly, Ortese presents the chapter ‘Viaggio in Liguria’ as representative of the book as a whole and suggests that the tormented figure of Alessi reflects her own uncertain condition of (female) travel writer in rapidly changing post-war Italy. As Ortese puts it,

E questo *Viaggio in Liguria* è proprio, per me, nella sua scrittura sbandata e ansiosa, spezzata, esitante, l’immagine dell’animo con cui cominciai a guardare l’Italia, dopo il ’60: spavento e già un deluso amore della ragione; la ragione (delle cose) non la vedevo più, come quell’Alessi che parla di continuo del suo comandante che lo perseguitava, e della terra ligure tutta *comprata* dal turismo.¹³¹

The uneasiness about the type of modernity that is taking shape in those years, is accompanied, in *La lente scura*, by another kind of anxiety, relating to Italy’s traditional lack of territorial cohesion. This theme may be detected, for instance, in the sense of attachment that some of the people described in the book show towards their places of origin. A quintessentially Italian phenomenon, this local sentiment, or *campanilismo*, is tied to the country’s historical fragmentation. An interesting example is offered by the conversation that Ortese exchanges with Nencini and one of his team colleagues, two professional cyclists who are participating in the Giro d’Italia, Italy’s most famous bicycle race. Ortese is covering the race as a journalist and interviews the two riders, who have won the previous Giro stage.

- Conoscevatelo il Sud? Lo avevate visto altre volte?
- Sì, altre volte.
- Che ve ne sembra di queste popolazioni? Gentili?

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 357.

¹³⁰ Wood, p. 187.

¹³¹ Ortese, *Lente*, p. 17.

- Sì.

- Ma la Toscana è molto più bella.¹³²

Nencini and his colleague are clearly from Tuscany. A couple of pages later, Ortese returns to them just to notice that they seem to have ‘la mente inerte a Firenze.’¹³³ Not only does the brief interview provide a glance into the two cyclists’ *campanilismo*, but it is also indicative of the fact that, in those years, the South is still a foreign land for large sectors of the Italian population. The Giro riders come from places that seem irreducibly different from one another and are generally people of humble origins, in most cases peasants or unskilled workers, attracted by the fame offered by the prestigious bicycle race.¹³⁴ Ortese also observes that the Italians who follow the Giro seem animated by an ‘obbligo sentimentale’,¹³⁵ as if their patriotism only emerged in isolated circumstances, based on superficial interests, such as the shared support of a football team or the fascination for popular sports figures. Thus, like Piovene, Ortese, too, detects, within Italian society, the absence of a solid foundation, based on moral unity and relevant common objectives, set out as a nation.

Travel writing exposes territorial imbalances and patterns of belonging and exclusion. From the point of view of the ‘centre’, that is to say the industrialised North and the ruling classes that had led Italy’s unification, the South still remains a remote and somewhat exotic territory. Forgacs has observed that the unification process in Italy (and arguably the creation of any modern nation) has involved the marginalisation of certain people and places (in the Italian case, the *Mezzogiorno*), which have been defined as peripheral in relation to core social groups and locations, established, instead, as central and important.¹³⁶ The notion of margin therefore entails a certain way of seeing the other, which is observed and objectified from a culturally powerful centre.¹³⁷ Italian travel writing reproduces in various ways the power relations between territories that are perceived as central and marginal for economic and geographical reasons. In *La lente scura*, Ortese avoids the kind of essentialist and monadic representation of the South that

¹³² Ortese, *Lente*, p. 170.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

¹³⁴ ‘Vogliono lasciarsi indietro, come un carcere, la loro classe, le pianure della povertà, dell’animo, dell’ignoranza, del male. Il libro chiuso, il pane duro’ (*Ibid.*, p. 171).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

¹³⁶ Forgacs, *Italy’s Margins*, p. 1.

¹³⁷ ‘No place is ever intrinsically marginal, peripheral or remote. It and its inhabitants are always marginal, peripheral or remote in relation to some centre elsewhere’ (*Ibid.*, p. 8).

stems from the traditional opposition to the more advanced North. She acknowledges that the South, and cities like Naples in particular, are also changing at an accelerated pace. In her view, however, the kind of modernity that is taking hold in Naples is two-sided, as if, while bringing undeniable benefits to the city, progress is also sacrificing some aspects of the local spirit. The transformations are taking place so rapidly that, paradoxically, the perception is almost of immobility.

Era tutto più *fermo*, come se il tempo si fosse messo a correre in modo da confondersi con l'immobilità, come se la ruota si fosse messa a girare vorticosamente in avanti – o anche questa era un'apparenza, e girava invece all'indietro? [...] Qualcosa mancava. C'era, senza dubbio, meno angoscia di ieri, meno desolazione e struggimento; si vedevano volti più nutriti, vestiti migliori, modi più distesi, ma anche una atonia, una indifferenza maggiori. C'è dunque meno speranza di ieri, o una speranza cui questa gente è estranea, che non la riguarda affatto?¹³⁸

As also appears in the following extract from the chapter *Verso Formia*, featuring a rural scene seen through the train window, Ortese generally plays with the categories of mobility and immobility when describing the impact of progress on the South. In this case, the speed of the train starkly contrasts with the apparent stillness of the people and things outside. This scene, however, is complicated by an element of doubt: Ortese wonders whether what she sees is reality or rather an illusory perception, and whether this part of Italy is actually still in time, therefore inviting her readers to question the same.

C'era su quella campagna, non so se effetto del confronto con la corsa del treno, come un velo, un'ombra non materiale, non uscita dalle nubi del cielo, ma generata quasi dal tempo. Tutto così fermo, che si era tentati di aprire il finestrino e immettere aria su quella tenera campagna, quasi là non ve ne fosse e si trattasse di un sogno.¹³⁹

Ortese's representation of the South therefore differs considerably from the commentary given by Piovene. As Wood has observed, Ortese shares the critical attitude toward modern urban society and abhors the dismissal of rural Italy and peasant

¹³⁸ Ortese, *Lente*, pp. 212-13.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

civilisation.¹⁴⁰ Ortese is sympathetic towards Southern customs and traditions, and reveals a more accusatory gaze toward the wealthier North for the signs of extreme poverty that still bears on the South. The outside landscape of the above extract has a counterpart in the humanity that populates the train, poor and almost animalistic, with the peasant women described as ‘donne-mulo’ and ‘donne-bestia’.¹⁴¹ Ortese observes that the harsh and unkind nature of the *Mezzogiorno* perfectly reflects these people’s living conditions, and is ‘padrona assoluta delle loro vite’.¹⁴² A poignant example is provided by the rural village of Montelepre in Western Sicily, the birthplace of the bandit Giuliano. In the long description dedicated to Montelepre and the barren mountains rising all around it, the key words *solitudine* and *silenzio* resonate stronger than ever.¹⁴³ It becomes clear, thus, that a charismatic figure like the bandit Giuliano comes to symbolise the possibility of emancipation, for, as Ortese comments, Giuliano ‘era Montelepre, era la popolazione di Montelepre; era la smania di un paese prigioniero del deserto, di una natura atroce: smania di liberazione, di felicità, di vita.’¹⁴⁴

The image of Italy that emerges from *La lente scura* is varied and fragmentary. Ortese conveys a highly detailed and almost impressionistic sense of place, which situates the reader in a concrete spatial reality and historical context. It would be difficult to assemble the pieces of mosaic in a book that is purposefully unsystematic and somewhat unresolved. On the one hand, one has geographical differences and boundaries, such as the divide between North and South: Ortese’s attentive gaze grasps the complexity of these distinctions and does not translate into a simplistic and static representation. On the other hand, Ortese’s gendered perspective is definitely less stable and assertive than the one adopted by Piovene, but, at the same time, represents a non-authoritative and more flexible approach, able to effectively call established assumptions into question. In this way, moreover, Ortese takes a stance against a masculine type of knowledge, which claims to be exhaustive and erases women as dissident voices.¹⁴⁵ This emerges, for instance, in Ortese’s connection with Alessi, as noted above. Alessi’s position of being

¹⁴⁰ Wood, p. 186.

¹⁴¹ Ortese, *Lente*, p. 206.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 447.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-32.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁴⁵ According to Rose, geographical knowledge may be considered masculinist in the sense that ‘masculinist work claims to be exhaustive and it therefore assumes that no-one else can add to its knowledge; it is therefore reluctant to listen to anyone else’ (p. 4).

harassed by a dominant male authority is perhaps what makes Ortese identify with his perspective: the experience of trauma and oppression in effect ‘feminises’ Alessi.

Ortese also notices that Italy’s social inequalities seem to have deepened in the immediate aftermath of the war. She confesses to have herself experienced severe financial difficulties while writing the articles that have merged in *La lente scura*, and blames her economic situation for ‘quella costante sensazione di disastro’ that permeates the book.¹⁴⁶ In post-war Italy, the diffusion of pastimes and new lifestyles that had until then been the prerogative of the elite, certainly bears witness to the fact that a wealthier middle class is appearing on the Italian scene. Nevertheless, Ortese also points out that, while newspapers and magazines feature the ‘personalità della vita cittadina’ in sought-after holiday destinations, the working class can only afford modest vacations, and some people never leave.¹⁴⁷ In Milan, these people are the new slaves who cannot afford to go on holiday, with entire families living in extreme socio-economic hardship and children being forced to work. As Ortese puts it, ‘per questi cittadini [...] Milano non era la grande Milano, ma una delle tante tappe del loro viaggio umano di italiani, di poveri.’¹⁴⁸ Arbasino also alludes to the development of the *villeggiatura* in post-war Italy, a new leisure habit prompted by ‘una situazione dove ci sono effettivamente più soldi che in qualunque altra fase italiana passata’.¹⁴⁹ As more and more people can afford to go on holiday, thanks to increased economic well-being, places such as the Riviera Romagnola and Capri, become popular vacation spots. As we shall see, however, the portrait that Arbasino gives of such places, is far less glamorous than the idea existing in the public mind.

4.4 Alberto Arbasino’s *Fratelli d’Italia*

Like Ortese’s *La lente scura*, Arbasino’s *Fratelli d’Italia* does not convey a strong sense of territorial cohesion. Arbasino openly rejects the clichés and stereotypes with which Italy has traditionally been portrayed in travel accounts, especially those of foreign authors. *Fratelli d’Italia* opens with a group of four friends – intellectuals, composers and

¹⁴⁶ Ortese, *Lente*, p. 451.

¹⁴⁷ Ortese, *Lente*, pp. 312-13.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 315-16.

¹⁴⁹ Arbasino, *Fratelli d’Italia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1963), p. 69. In this chapter, I almost exclusively refer to the original edition of 1963. Any exception will be signalled.

screenwriters – who are planning to go on a journey across Italy, in search of ideas for the movie *L'Italia si chiama amore*, which they have been commissioned to write.¹⁵⁰ Arbasino's parodic intent is evident here as it is in the title of the book itself, which echoes Italy's national anthem with a jarring effect. The main characters of the book are the first-person narrator, known by the nickname 'l'Elefante', and his friend Antonio (who will change his name into Andrea in the second edition of the book, to return as Antonio in the third). They are flanked by Jean-Claude, who is French, and Klaus, 'un tedesco mezzo americano'.¹⁵¹ While, in *Fratelli d'Italia*, the pretext to start the journey may resemble that of the many authors that, in the course of the twentieth century, 'took the roads of Italy, often sponsored by newspaper and magazine editors',¹⁵² to write their own account of the country's changing sociocultural landscape, in fact Arbasino is less interested in describing the latter than in satirising the stylistic features and stereotypes of the classic Italian journey.¹⁵³ As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Arbasino belongs to the tradition of travel accounts inaugurated by Sterne, in which the focus shifts from the observed reality to the observing eye. Indeed, *Fratelli d'Italia* presents a particularly interesting case in relation to the subjectivity of the author-narrator in travel writing. A psychological profile of the characters emerges from the frequent conversations in which they engage, mostly on the state of contemporary Italian culture. The fact that three of them are homosexual (and Arbasino himself is openly gay), arguably provides us with an original point of view, different from those of Piovene and Ortese. It is also interesting to note that Jean-Claude and Klaus are foreigners, and the narrator himself was born in Italian Switzerland, as we apprehend from his accounts of the war years, which he has spent in the neutral country. The different and original point of view provided by Arbasino, is reflected in the content and style of the book itself.

In *Fratelli d'Italia*, the clichés that have accompanied the narrations of foreign travellers are exposed and parodied, and Italian society emerges for what it is, devoid of any romanticising descriptions. This intent, clear from the first edition of the book, is

¹⁵⁰ 'Questi tre, Antonio, Jean-Claude e Klaus, il loro produttore tanto li paga perché vadano su e giù per l'Italia a mettere insieme la storia e scegliere un po' di luoghi' (Ibid., p. 14).

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁵² Ouditt and Polezzi, p. 102.

¹⁵³ An example may be: 'La storia bisogna poi che sia estiva, assolutamente, sentimentalissima, con tanti Vesuvi e tante gondole, e colori-colori-colori' (Arbasino, p. 10). A further example is provided by Arbasino's parody of the stereotyped story of the beautiful foreign woman travelling to Italy, who inevitably ends up falling in love with a charming Italian man: 'E in ogni caso si passano delle grandi ore d'incanto prima di ripartire al suono della mandolinata-del-primo-incontro, ora più struggente e con un coro in distanza' (Ibid., p. 14).

explicitly declared by Andrea in the second, while discussing the film project on which he is working with Jean-Claude and Klaus, which is still at an early and rather confused stage.

Utilizziamo a ogni costo il gran tema del Viaggio in Italia? [...] A un patto, si capisce: questa vacanza come una trama narrativa, però in una forma che non si saprebbe davvero immaginare più dissimile dal tradizionale itinerario così geograficamente e sentimentalmente ordinato del Grand Tour.¹⁵⁴

The reversal operation suggested in the passage represents a narrative stratagem for Arbasino to come to terms with the tradition of the Grand Tour, whose importance he certainly does not intend to deny.¹⁵⁵ On the contrary, Arbasino seems to argue that any piece of travel literature engaging with the theme of the Italian journey, should incorporate a critical reflection on the Grand Tour, which represents ‘quasi una definizione per antonomasia dell’esperienza itinerante in Italia’.¹⁵⁶ That being said, *Fratelli d’Italia* appropriates the classic theme of the *Viaggio in Italia* only to transform it. Indeed, the initial idea of travelling across Italy to write the film screenplay is soon abandoned by the characters, to privilege itineraries that are mostly motivated by erotic desire or the occasional invitation to gatherings of intellectuals and members of the upper-middle class, to the point that the book soon turns into a portrait of this glittering world, seen through Arbasino’s cynical lens.¹⁵⁷ The disorderly itineraries described in the book, are very different from the established paths of the Grand Tour as from Piovene’s systematic exploration of Italy, one region after the other. Moreover, in their wanderings in Italy and abroad, Andrea and l’Elefante continue, more or less purposefully, to run into friends and acquaintances: it is therefore a European, well-educated, and mobile society that is depicted in the book.

The novel has, indeed, an international feel and, comparing to the texts of Piovene and Ortese, describes a very different national – and transnational – kind of mobility. Arbasino inaugurates an ‘on the road’ style that will be continued, among others, by Pier Vittorio Tondelli. Antonio and l’Elefante have extremely sophisticated tastes and are

¹⁵⁴ Alberto Arbasino, *Fratelli d’Italia*, 2nd edn (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), p. 19.

¹⁵⁵ Papotti, pp. 351-52.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

¹⁵⁷ Arbasino describes these elitist circles as ‘sciami cinguettanti dei mondani’ (p. 355).

certainly privileged, for they travel with ease and with availability of means and money. In this respect, they may be seen as a modern version of the Grand Tour young aristocratic traveller. Antonio is an established intellectual who earns well writing for Italy's foremost newspapers, while the narrator is a University student who goes on to work in finance in Zurich. The extract below, sketching a brief sociology of the types that one may encounter in a motorway service area, is however indicative of the broader process of democratisation that travel undergoes in post-war Italy, when, thanks to the new socio-economic situation, it becomes 'per tutti'.¹⁵⁸

E che felicità le soste sull'autostrada: bere, lavarsi, verificare sulla realtà le ipotesi di studio, tra facce sempre più incredibili... Cani che saltano fuori a coppie dalle Flaminie, bambini d'una biondezza che non s'era mai vista, proletari in tuta che per la prima volta nella storia sociale d'Italia siedono a un ristorante praticamente di lusso per un buon pasto completo col loro vino e il loro caffè... anche se il contesto sociologico qui è un po' balordo, tutto di tedeschi in sandali gialli e braghe corte, con la Volkswagen fuori...¹⁵⁹

The service area is populated by people from different socio-cultural backgrounds and nationalities, who are recreating their own modern and 'motorised' version of *Viaggio in Italia*. The working class too partake in the movement revolution and share the sense of freedom that comes with speeding away on the motorway. For the lower classes, food consumed in the service area becomes a luxury meal experience, as to say that, in the space of the motorway, social and cultural differences momentarily disappear. A further difference, in relation to Ortese and Piovene, is the relevance, in *Fratelli d'Italia*, of the car as the main means of transport, which bears witness of the mass production of automobiles in 1950s and 1960s Italy. The book conveys the sense of revolutionary freedom associated with cars – freedom to randomly choose where to go and to reach destinations that have never been so close at hand – as well as the idea that cars 'empower individuals through their own explosive mobility.'¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Liliana Pittarello, 'Il Touring Club Italiano e la sua editoria: il "viaggio in Italia" per tutti e l'immagine del Paese', in *Siamo come eravamo?: l'immagine Italia nel tempo*, ed. by E. Kanceff (Moncalieri: Centro interuniversitario di ricerche sul Viaggio in Italia, 2016), vol. 2, pp. 975-1008.

¹⁵⁹ Arbasino, p. 363.

¹⁶⁰ Sidonie Smith, 'On the Road: (Auto)mobility and Gendered Detours', in *Travel Writing*, ed. by Youngs and Forsdick, vol. 3, pp. 98-126 (p. 99).

Among the texts examined in this chapter, *Fratelli d'Italia* arguably shows more evidently the tendency to reflect on the idea of travel and on its very own status of travel book (a postmodern textual practice applied to travel writing),¹⁶¹ both through the revitalisation of the tradition of the Grand Tour, even though turned upside down, and Arbasino's ironic detachment. As a homosexual writer, arguably Arbasino occupies a position somehow in the middle between Piovene and Ortese. His rewriting of the Grand Tour with an international feel, as well as the sense of belonging to a cosmopolitan, rather than national, community, may also be read as the expression of Arbasino's non-alignment with dominant ideas on gender and sexuality in 1960s Italy. To put it in other words, the problematisation of the classic Grand Tour, in *Fratelli d'Italia*, also relies on the point of view of homosexuality and liberated sexual behaviour, adopted by Arbasino. In this sense, Arbasino takes a queer perspective on the Grand Tour and on Italy as nation. The issue of alterity is, indeed, central to queer (non)identity.¹⁶² More specifically, the notion of queerness expresses a radical alternative to traditional conceptions of identity and (self-)representation, defined by heteronormativity.¹⁶³ In aiming to represent the full spectrum of differences within the gay and lesbian community, queer theory questions the very idea of identity defined from the outside and based on social norms, in a critical self-reflexive attitude that is reminiscent of Arbasino's own textual approach in *Fratelli d'Italia*. As Isolina Misuri Douglas has commented,

Arbasino's discourse in *Fratelli d'Italia* also predates more recent literary theories such as Queer theory. [...] it is now possible to examine the book in this light and to realize that the reviewers' ignoring (or dismissing) the theme of homosexuality

¹⁶¹ Holland and Huggan, p. 490.

¹⁶² Morland and Willox argue that 'certainly the primary challenge posed by queer theory [...] is to hegemonic understandings of the relations between identity, sex, gender and sexuality. Whereas Western culture has attempted to ossify these relations in the name of patriarchy, and feminism has tended to want to reconfigure them while preserving their conventional descriptive force, queer theory politicizes sex, gender and sexuality in a way that severs the notion of identity from any stable reference points. In this way, queerness resists the regimes [...] of measuring, categorizing, and knowing the truth of sexual orientation'. Iain Morland and Annabelle Willox, 'Introduction', in *Queer Theory*, ed. by Morland and Willox (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 1-5 (p. 4).

¹⁶³ Edelman points out 'the appropriately perverse refusal that characterizes queer theory – of every substantialization of identity, which is always oppositionally defined, and, by extension, of history as a linear narrative (the poor man's teleology) in which meaning succeeds in revealing itself – *as itself* – through time. [...] the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form' (p. 4).

in *Fratelli d'Italia* reveals that the Italian cultural establishment was not as *à la page* as it wished to think it was.¹⁶⁴

We have seen that the characters' movements in the book often betray the search for erotic encounters and therefore delineate a sexual topography of places that are mostly assigned to clandestine meetings and male prostitution. What Iacoli has observed in relation to the Emilia 'nottambula e libertina', described by Tondelli – who, as mentioned above, may in many ways be regarded as a successor of Arbasino –, that is to say that this overlaps with, rather than replaces, the better-known, Felliniesque image of Emilia-Romagna as 'grassa e lunatica',¹⁶⁵ may therefore also apply to our analysis. Indeed, in a similar way, Arbasino does not dismiss the importance of the Grand Tour tradition, but plays with it creatively. *Fratelli d'Italia* comes to terms with the Grand Tour by re-codifying some of its aspects, while discarding others altogether. Hence, for instance, the reason behind travel does not concern any longer personal and artistic formation (albeit, at the beginning of the book, the reader is bound to believe so), but rather, more prosaically, the research of erotic encounters or the invitation to rather vacuous gatherings of intellectuals. Arguably, it is no coincidence that Jean-Claude and Klaus, friends of the two main characters, are respectively French and German, but with a much more disenchanted outlook on Italy than their fellow-country men, who were travelling in the country two centuries before.

The characters' journeys in the book, are often the occasion to express irony about the places visited, especially when these are iconic locations in the sentimental geography of the *Bel Paese*. Capri, for instance, is described as tedious, castigated and out of fashion.¹⁶⁶

Ma l'isola dell'amore, che stretta al cuore, col suo squallore da posto fuori moda, la gente che gira a vuoto con lo sguardo balordo: luogo di castigatezza, oltre tutto, perché le dissipazioni che fino a dieci anni fa si facevano in località eccentriche ora sappiamo benissimo che si

¹⁶⁴ Isolina Misuri Douglas, 'Fratelli d'Italia: Alberto Arbasino's "Great Comedy of the Sixties"', *Italian Quarterly*, 161-162 (2004), 68-81 (pp. 72-73).

¹⁶⁵ Giulio Iacoli, *Atlante delle derive* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2002), p. 91.

¹⁶⁶ Similarly, Arbasino writes in relation to Naples: 'Non so cosa farmene del sole mediterraneo e dell'eredità classica e dell'architettura normanna e delle semplici gioie della vita contadina e della pizza alla pescatora' (p. 16).

commettono specialmente nelle grandi città industriali con più di un milione di abitanti; e qui si viene soltanto per riposarsi o per piangere.¹⁶⁷

The above passage is a clear example of the reversal operation carried out by Arbasino to challenge common ideas and stereotypes tied to places. Capri, the ‘isola dell’amore’ in the public imagination, is a place where nothing happens, suitable for mass tourists and wealthy people who want to find inner peace, in sharp contrast with the bustling and diverse prospect of life offered by the metropolises of the North. Here, Arbasino hints at 1960s Italy’s rapidly transforming urban landscape, with the great cities, mainly concentrated in the North, becoming the new pole of attraction for both the working class and educated young people in search of new opportunities and stimuli. The fact that, in *Fratelli d’Italia*, modern city life bears positive connotations of progress and history in motion, may also be read in relation to the new interest for the present that emerges in Italian travel writing from the second half of the nineteenth century, and particularly after Italy’s unification.¹⁶⁸ The Risorgimento was indeed perceived by its contemporaries as a watershed and immediately acted as a new defining moment in modern Italy’s periodisation.¹⁶⁹ In *Fratelli d’Italia*, the emphasis on the present is reinforced by the caricature portrait that Arbasino gives of those who go on repeating banalities about Italy’s past, historical patrimony and architectural beauties. The extract below, for instance, which reports the commonplace conversation between a group of old people who enumerate the beauties of Italy, is a further example of the intent of the book to debunk the clichéd rhetoric of the *Bel Paese*.

I vecchi sostengono che Villa d’Este invece non è bella perché è stretta, ma uno intende Villa d’Este a Tivoli, l’altro capiva invece quella sul lago di Como, e così vanno avanti un pezzo prima di passare a discutere la Ca’ d’Oro e le Due Torri di Bologna. ‘Eh, le bellezze d’Italia...’ ripetono ogni tanto. ‘Non ce n’è da nessun’altra parte...’.¹⁷⁰

Ultimately, what matters in the book is movement *per se*. In this regard, too, *Fratelli d’Italia* is revelatory of the affinity between travel writing and the aesthetics of

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁶⁸ Clerici, *Viaggiatore*, p. xxvi.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. xxvii.

¹⁷⁰ Arbasino, pp. 20-21.

postmodernism, which share some significant traits: chiefly, the unstable point of view of the observer and the multiple meanings associated with notions of time and space, which also become less stable and self-assertive.¹⁷¹ As Chambers has noted, postmodern travel implies

The dislocation of the intellectual subject and his – the gender is deliberate – mastery of the word/world. The illusions of identity organized around the privileged voice and stable subjectivity of the ‘external’ observer are swept up and broken down into a movement that no longer permits the obvious institution of self-identity between thought and reality.¹⁷²

The main point of view, in *Fratelli d’Italia*, is expressed by a somewhat whimsical and perhaps not entirely reliable, narrator, who filters reality through his marked degree of irony. A narrator who, more importantly, challenges the heterosexual male-centred, objective perspective on which many works in travel literature, including Piovene’s *Viaggio in Italia*, have relied. Moreover, the strong sense of place conveyed in the texts of Piovene and Ortese, is replaced, in *Fratelli d’Italia*, by a travel account in which places are somehow interchangeable and nothing is as relevant as the idea of movement itself.

Comunque per me il posto non importa niente; glie lo ripeto, a Antonio. Purché ci sia da far tanto. Basta muoversi e non esagerare a fermarsi in una città, quando è chiaro che non va bene. [...] Ferrara o Varsavia, si capisce che per me è lo stesso.¹⁷³

Papotti claims that this ‘posizione, portata all’estremo, conduce ad una sorta di nuova condizione “apolide” dello scrittore, in cui l’identità risiede solo nella posizione di osservatore, e narratore, delle realtà incontrate durante il viaggio.’¹⁷⁴ In the following passage, referring to an evening spent in a restaurant in Gaeta, on the way to Capri at the beginning of the book, the restaurant style and the presence of specific objects evoke associations with different and distant places, such as the Tyrol, London and the Netherlands.

¹⁷¹ Holland and Huggan, p. 489.

¹⁷² Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 95.

¹⁷³ Arbasino, p. 14.

¹⁷⁴ Papotti, p. 356.

Ma dove siamo? L'aria fuori è grigia, col cielo coperto; qui dentro sui muri ci sono degli affreschi montanari, hanno delle stelle alpine in un vasetto davanti all'acquario. È Gaeta o è Tirolo? Quando suona l'ora, l'orologio del ristorante è a cucù, e i campanili fuori sembra che abbiano tutti un carillon tipo Westminster o tipo Olanda.¹⁷⁵

The ease with which connections and similarities are established between the places, is indicative of the new importance assigned to the point of view of the observer, as well as of the increased knowledge of and freedom in space, which are made possible through widespread road improvements and the diffusion of modern means of transport, chiefly the motorcar.

In *Fratelli d'Italia*, the characters share memories of their previous trips to European countries, such as Poland, Hungary and Greece, to name but a few. Foreign locations are assigned new prominence, in a sort of '*Grand Tour alla rovescia*,'¹⁷⁶ both in terms of the selected itineraries and travel organisation, which is mostly improvised, as it relies on the characters' volatile desires.

Stavolta si era pensato di far tutta una cosa di Europa orientale. Un giro di capitali tzigane, andando su da Vienna e toccando Budapest, Praga, Varsavia, prima l'una o l'altra, come viene viene; prendendo dentro anche un po' di Breslavia e di Cracovia; e finire a Berlino [...]. Per tornare, poi, un gran avanti-e-indietro sull'autobahn, tutto sull'imprevisto e sul caso.¹⁷⁷

London, too, is often mentioned in the book and the last chapter is entirely set there. Antonio and l'Elefante know local people and street names, and can generally find their way easily in Central London: a sign that they have been in the city several times and that they feel almost at home here. In *Fratelli d'Italia*, the dominant perspective is therefore that of very learned and libertine group of homosexual men: a type of European intellectual perfectly at ease in the cultural milieu of the main European capital cities.

The book is a portrait of the new intense and feverish mobility of the boom years. Arbasino communicates the idea of increased movement through the accumulation and juxtaposition of spatial elements, where historical and natural features overlap with 'il

¹⁷⁵ Arbasino, p. 13.

¹⁷⁶ Papotti, p. 355.

¹⁷⁷ Arbasino, p. 8.

lato tutto-plastica, da miracolo economico',¹⁷⁸ as shown, for instance, by the following example.

Prima che sia tardi ci si butta verso i meravigliosi odori di campagna e d'estate delle villette classiche e dei sepolcri romani, cascine del Cinquecento, ville fasciste, antenne elettriche, grotte, elicotteri, avieri, greggi di pecore, mucchi d'immondizie e in fondo la muraglia dei quartieri nuovi. Forse il gusto del paesaggio riprende a trasformarsi come quando i viaggiatori del Settecento smettono di cercare in Italia una natura alla Carracci-Poussin e pretendono l'orrido romantico e la rovina gotica.¹⁷⁹

Arbasino's accumulation technique conveys a sense of motion, by expressing the overabundance of stimuli and things seen. It reflects the rise of movement, which privileges thoroughfares and motorways to the enclosed spaces of the city.

Ma in principio di serata, meglio buttarsi sulle autostrade. Prendiamo quella dei laghi. Prima non si vede niente: qualche fanale giallo; e si va. Poi lumi natalizi, archi di cemento altissimi; e sotto, una costruzione cilindrica di cristallo che pare più grande e più ricca dei padiglioni americani alle esposizioni universali. Frecce, pensiline, sottopassaggi, e porte che si aprono solo in un senso, nell'altro no; cariche dei soliti divieti di sosta.¹⁸⁰

The characters' hectic wandering, in *Fratelli d'Italia*, ultimately represents an attempt to escape the *ennui* and disillusionment of everyday life in post-war Italy. As it turns out, however, travel cannot offer a real compensation: on the contrary, at the dawn of the postmodern era, it becomes yet another source of dissatisfaction. With the dismissal of the stable and unitary perspective of the observer, the postmodern relationship between traveller and observed reality becomes more anxious and fleeting. The Romantic idea of

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 264.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 352-53. Another example may be: 'In strada per Mantova, tutta una sconcia parodia del "Forse che sì": eccessi di velocità e dissennate erezioni in un panorama piatto e disteso di salici grigi e di pioppi argentati, tutto un Lancret, con pennoni e bandiere sventolanti di Esso e Morra e Alemagna e Cortemaggiore cani a sei zampe da tutte le parti, lampi gialli e verdi e celesti di tute e distributori, riflessi di cristalli nei posti di ristoro, luccichio d'alluminio e di finti-mogani intorno alle culone in calzoni d'imprimé giallo che comprano Krek e patatine fritte e biscotti' (p. 363).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 389.

self-discovery in relation to the landscape becomes more complex and volatile to the point that, as Iacoli has argued, in the postmodern era there cannot be any mirroring of the subject through the landscape, and the postmodern subject-traveller is bound to continue to travel, even though s/he does not find satisfaction in it.¹⁸¹ Iacoli refers to this condition as postmodern flânerie.¹⁸²

Arbasino ideally concludes the trajectory delineated by textual analysis in this chapter, since, on the one hand, *Fratelli d'Italia* complements the points of view offered by Piovene and Ortese, and, on the other, it internalises postmodern features and ideas, such as the self-reflective and ironic attitude, the parodic revisioning of the traditional motif of the Italian journey, and the more fleeting relationship between observer and reality. The following concluding section further explores these points.

4.5 Conclusions

The discussion in this chapter has picked up from where the previous two chapters left off, by exploring the feelings of existential anxiety that have emerged through textual analysis in Chapters 2 and 3, as the trigger that prompts many Italian writers and intellectuals to explore the national territory in the post-war years. Thus, in this chapter, anxiety has also been interpreted as the driving force that leads the examined authors to problematise codified ways of describing Italy within the Italian travel writing tradition. Indeed, the chapter has shown that, albeit in different ways, all of the texts under scrutiny challenge the clichéd narratives that have generally characterised the writings of foreign travellers in Italy, by offering their own original account of Italian journey. In rejecting the reductive rhetoric of the Grand Tour and in embracing, instead, the complexity and socio-cultural differentiation of the Italian territory, texts like *Viaggio in Italia* and *La lente scura* open up to the confrontation with the process of modernisation in Italy and with its contradictions. Piovene's systematic approach shows that the socio-cultural and geographical complexity of the Italian territory is far more extended than the established

¹⁸¹ 'L'oltrepassamento della modernità non consente al soggetto una identificazione mediante un placido rispecchiamento nel paesaggio circostante, poiché egli è destinato a non fermarsi, a vagare' (Iacoli, *Atlante*, p. 13).

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

paths of the Grand Tour may seem to suggest. Ortese further complicates the picture by intertwining her exploration of post-war Italy with her own inner experience of self-discovery. Arbasino may seem to embrace a more hedonistic kind of travel, but his sarcasm betrays a critical self-reflexive perspective, as well as the full adaptation of clichéd descriptions and representations. Arbasino's irony, as Rodighiero has argued, 'ha sempre un elemento di consapevolezza e di distacco metalinguistico, di riflessione divertita.'¹⁸³ Hence, among post-war Italian travel writers, there can be registered a rising awareness and the emergence of a new, critical voice, able to appropriate and problematise tropes and classic themes that had long dominated travel accounts of the Italian peninsula, and thus to question established notions of national space.¹⁸⁴

The chapter has also documented how travel literature, and specifically the texts under scrutiny, give prominence to aspects that may be regarded as less relevant, such as the subjectivity of the observer in relation to the observed reality, and the representation of marginal geographical areas.¹⁸⁵ All of the three authors examined in the chapter, present a very specific authorial voice, which has been analysed in relation to social factors and gender roles, within the discursive constraints of the period under scrutiny. Arguably, the concept of self-discovery bears deeper implications, intertwined with notions of gender and sexuality, for Ortese and Arbasino, who assign new centrality to the point of view and individuality of the observer. The chapter has shown that the originality and value of their travel accounts lie chiefly in their non-alignment with dominant and 'objective' ways of seeing, and in their embracing, instead, the existential uncertainty of the post-war years, which they translate creatively in their work, through a perspective that challenges the kind of heterosexual-male-centred viewpoint expressed by *Viaggio in Italia*. In so doing, Ortese and Arbasino open a space of contestation against dominant discourses, not only on space, but also on gender and sexuality, in post-war Italian society. While Piovene's contribution to a better understanding of the complexity of Italian society cannot be denied, the authoritative viewpoint that he claims for himself means that he is not immune to stereotyping and actually, in some cases, ends up recreating essentialist views of the places and people that he encounters.

¹⁸³ Rodighiero, p. 271.

¹⁸⁴ 'Persa l'idea normativa del "libro di viaggio", abbandonato il codificato stile del diario del Grand Tour, la voce narrativa del moderno pellegrino letterario si avventura alla ricerca di nuovi sentieri' (Papotti, p. 351).

¹⁸⁵ Clerici, *Viaggiatore*, p. xii.

Particularly interesting and revealing in the context of this research, is the evolution of the position of the observer, traced by literary analysis in this chapter: from the stable point of view adopted by Piovene, still relying on a modernist paradigm and realist conventions, to literary experimentalism that also signals a less secure notion of space and a more anxious relationship between the observer and the observed reality, with Arbasino. *Fratelli d'Italia* is a travel book that is also about travel and the multiple meanings associated with it; a book in which, as was seen, the emphasis is put on the action of movement *per se* and the actual destinations are devoid of importance: indeed, they are somewhat interchangeable. With Ortese, too, travel becomes a more introspective and destabilising experience. The examples of Arbasino and Ortese therefore suggest that, for post-war Italian travel writers, travel becomes not only a means of critical exploration of the encountered realities and of themselves, as intellectuals and Italians in a peculiar moment of the country's recent history, but also a way to reflect on the tradition and value of travel itself, in a postmodern movement towards self-reflexivity. As mentioned above, it is ideal to conclude this chapter, and *de facto* this dissertation, with Arbasino, one of the leading figures of the so-called *Neoavanguardia*, a movement that inaugurates a new phase in the Italian cultural debate, marked by literary experimentalism and efforts to call into question the traditional literary canon.

The new idea of travel as critical exploration, conveyed by the texts analysed in this chapter, helps to illuminate the Italian post-war years as a contested space, in which feelings of hope and anxiety intersect. Another problematic notion that was discussed through textual analysis, is that of geographical margin and, specifically, of the Italian South, which emerges as a site of resistance to the dominant model of modernity, embodied by the more advanced North. We have seen that the authors under scrutiny approach the Southern question in different ways and that, generally speaking, Ortese and Arbasino reject the quasi-colonial juxtaposition of centre (North) and periphery (South), which one may find, instead, in *Viaggio in Italia*. As repressed modernity, moreover, the theme of the South links us back to the discussion in Chapter 3, in which the issue of Italy's repressed past has been discussed through the unfamiliar and unsettling urban scenes, depicted by crime writers Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini. The image of Italy as a 'strange' and somewhat sinister place, which intertwines with the interior landscape of the writers – particularly in the descriptions offered by Ortese, but also in the frantic juxtaposition of elements of Arbasino – may be seen as a reflection of the fact

that, until the post-war period, travel had been the prerogative of privileged sectors of the Italian population and that, therefore, at the time, most people had little knowledge of their own country. More importantly, uncanny descriptions of the landscape may be linked to Italy's troubled sense of national identity, not yet accomplished in the post-war years, but actually tested again at this crucial moment of Italian history. In this sense, it can be argued that Italian travel writers are motivated to adopt a foreigner's or outsider's perspective – the tradition of the *Viaggio in Italia* being largely the domain of foreign authors – to account to readers for the 'strange place' that is a modern, changing Italy. Travel writing enables a broader understanding of Italy's problematic sense of identity, which can be traced back well before the time frame examined in this research, to the post-unification period. The chapter has therefore offered an interpretation of how the texts relate, from their specific and 'internal' perspective, to the 'ongoing unfinished project'¹⁸⁶ of Italian unification and to Italy's historical differentiation, as well as to iconic images of Italy, codified in the tradition of travel writing.

¹⁸⁶ Valtorta, Hill, and Minghelli, p. 54.

Conclusions

At this stage, we may tie together some of the main ideas and threads underpinning this dissertation, by summing up each chapter and returning to the research questions that were outlined in Chapter 1, in order to articulate some of the findings that have emerged from the analysis of the primary texts. The first question posed in Chapter 1 was: how do the selected authors respond to and document Italy's post-war transition through their narration of the country's changing socio-cultural landscape? On the specific question of the originality of the literary perspective that has been adopted in this dissertation, I shall return again later with some additional remarks, but it should be clear now that the three main chapters of the thesis addressed the above question through case studies belonging to different literary genres, thus providing a multifaceted account of the socio-spatial transformations of post-war Italy and illuminating some key issues and trends of Italian society of the time. Specifically, Chapters 2 and 3 gave voice to the criticism of the model of urban and economic development that gradually takes shape in Italy after the end of the reconstruction years, by looking, respectively, at Bianciardi's and Volponi's novels, and the crime fiction of Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini. By focusing on post-war Italian travel writing, Chapter 4 discussed, instead, the questions of the Italian territory and identity, examining how these and some of the common ideas associated with them, are called into question in the post-war period.

The novels analysed in Chapter 2, Bianciardi's *La vita agra* and Volponi's *Memoriale* and *Le mosche del capitale*, give a critical portrayal of the Milan and Turin of the 1960s and 1970s, mainly emphasising the negative effects of urbanisation. As was pointed out in the chapter, there is no doubt that modern metropolitan life, with its variegated social landscape and diluted modes of identity, also enhances opportunities for self-determination and facilitates the enfranchisement from traditional systems of relations: a phenomenon that, in post-war Italy, is especially evident in the case of women and young people. This perspective is not completely absent from the examined texts. Indeed, as was argued, these are informed by a double movement of rejection–attraction toward metropolitan life, which ultimately provides the writers with the material for their novels. We saw that rejection takes the form of the withdrawal into protective microcosms – Brera for Luciano and the countryside near Turin for Albino – which, albeit still

connected to the city, are represented as spaces of resistance outside the power relations undergirding urban society. The critical attitude adopted by Bianciardi and Volponi focuses on the downsides of the post-war urbanisation and modernisation processes, exposing the fact that post-war Italy's urban renewal accommodates economic interests rather than responding to the actual needs of urban dwellers, who have become producers and consumers, with the poorer and not economically fit being pushed outward to the margins of urban society. In so doing, Bianciardi and Volponi also hint at the commodification of urban space in capitalist societies, which has emerged as an important field of inquiry in contemporary urban studies.

It was said that the novels of Bianciardi and Volponi bear ideological connotations, as they depict a politico-sociological notion of the city by engaging with the realities of financial capitalism, the industrial world, and emerging mass consumerist culture. Crucially, moreover, Bianciardi's and Volponi's novels bring to the fore the issue of a survived continuity with the Italian pre-war period, which is a central thread in this dissertation. After the fall of Fascism and the end of World War II, the Cold War entails a continuing totalitarian threat, which in Italy is somehow exacerbated by the country's conflictual relation with its own history. As was seen, in the examined novels, the parallel with Fascism and the war period is established through the presence of authoritarian characters that are associated with the industrial elite, as well as through the war metaphors scattered through the texts. Furthermore, and more importantly, this connection is established by Bianciardi and Volponi through the description of modern industrial architecture and urban spaces, which are the spatial concretisation of capitalist power. In order to investigate these issues, textual analysis in Chapter 2 relied on theories of the interconnection between power and space developed by Foucault and Lefebvre, who have been among the foremost promoters of the so-called spatial turn in contemporary critical thought.

The resistance to the idea of authoritarian city and the values of efficiency and rationality on which it is predicated bridges Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 3 looked at Milan and Turin through a series of crime novels, written between 1966 and 1979, by Scerbanenco and the writing pair of Fruttero & Lucentini, which are also vivid documents of the rapid transformation undergone in those years by the two cities. As was discussed in the chapter, modern crime literature celebrates the underground and unfathomable city, and consequently negates the possibility to control the urban environment in a rational

way. In much the same way, the novels examined in Chapter 3 emphasise those aspects of post-war modernisation and urbanisation that evoke feelings of estrangement and uneasiness. Scerbanenco's Lamberti novels depict modern Milan as a hub for organised crime and illegal trafficking, in which widespread violence signals the loss of control over the city, which has acquired an international dimension. In Fruttero & Lucentini's crime fiction, the shifting social landscape of Turin, a city that is described as elusive and difficult to navigate, conveys a tension between familiar and unfamiliar, which leans decisively toward the latter in the second of their Turinese novels, *A che punto è la notte*. Here, indeed, the crepuscular atmosphere combines with the suburban setting to signal a further shift in urban experience, as post-industrial Turin appears even more abstract and therefore difficult to penetrate. As in the case of the previous chapter, Chapter 3 also drew on critical theory and, specifically, the renewed interest in the irrational and in the Freudian theory of the uncanny. Freud's idea of the uncanny as the return of the repressed shed new light on the question of Italy's unresolved relation with its past, also at the core of Chapter 2. Moreover, the rapid pace of post-war socio-economic change, with the consumer society taking shape after the end of World War II, were interpreted within the frame of the irruption of the unfamiliar and unknown into ordinary life, which is at the heart of Freud's notion of uncanniness.

A further idea that was developed in Chapter 3, concerns the interconnection between urbanisation and the development of Italian crime fiction during the time frame under scrutiny in this research. In order to bring this issue into focus, one section of the chapter was devoted to the theme of the periphery and urban margins, that is, especially uncanny and dangerous locations in the imagery connected with the city. More specifically, it was discussed how, in the examined texts, the link between urbanisation and the evolution of crime finds expression in the description of criminal activities that follow the expansion of the city and the geography of industrialisation (and that show the efficiency of modern industry), as well as in the analysis of the socio-anthropological implications of economic development. The latter can especially be detected in the trajectories of those characters who, having been left behind by post-war modernisation and often finding themselves at the margins of urban society, are more likely to turn to crime or end up in dangerous situations. Whilst, in Scerbanenco's crime fiction, all places in Milan seem potentially dangerous, the poorer areas of the urban periphery are especially associated with ideas of social isolation and violence. As mentioned above,

Fruttero & Lucentini's *A che punto è la notte* is mostly set in Turin's urban belt, where the activities of the criminal group, which includes two Fiat executives in its ranks, have developed more discreetly in anonymous locations and decommissioned industrial areas. Thus, it can be said that the examined novels generally conform to the idea of the urban fringe as bleak and dangerous, which, in Chapter 3, was debunked by referring to John Foot's study of the Milanese periphery and his analysis of the common clichés and stereotypes applied to modern Italian suburbs. At the same time, however, it was argued that Scerbanenco and Fruttero & Lucentini also accord literary dignity to the periphery, by making it an integral component of their stories and, by implication, a legitimate part of the cities in which these are set.

The broadening movement described by the succession of the chapters in this dissertation – from the circumscribed focus on the Northern industrial cities, to the more decentred perspective offered by Chapter 4 – reflects symbolically the increasing openness toward postmodern theories and ideas in Italian literature and culture of the time. Whilst it can be said that all of the chapters in this dissertation are implicated with the postmodern turn in literature, most notably through the selection of literary genres that have been employed, this is especially evident in Chapter 4, which includes gendered and queer perspectives that have grown out of the postmodern paradigm. A similar trajectory can be traced within Chapter 4 itself, specifically through the evolution of the point of view expressed by the three examined authors: from Piovene's *Viaggio in Italia*, with its neatly separated and contained chapters, referring to concrete and knowable destinations, to Ortese's less self-assured perspective, which dwells on the incongruities that upset our understanding of reality, in the interweaving of internal and external landscapes, and, finally, the magmatic and somewhat logorrheic travel account of Arbasino. In other words, the confident traveller-observer that, in *Viaggio in Italia*, claims the authority of truth telling, is replaced by the more unstable and decentralised viewpoint that can be found in the travel accounts of Ortese and Arbasino, which arguably show an incipient postmodern sensibility. The chapter also discussed the notion of geographical margin through the theme of the Italian South, which, as repressed modernity, links back to the previous two chapters. Indeed, in their analyses of national spatial issues and the notion of Italian identity, the texts examined in Chapter 4, demonstrated that the issue of the Italian past is still resonant.

Chapter 4 showed that, albeit in different ways, all of the texts under scrutiny complicate the stereotyped representations of the Italian territory and identity which have been codified by foreign travellers writing about Italy. Piovene does so by documenting the socio-cultural complexity of the Italian territory, beyond the reductive rhetoric of the Grand Tour and *Bel Paese*; Ortese and Arbasino by adopting a point of view that, together with established notions of national space, challenges gender and sexual normativity. Furthermore, all of the examined texts are underpinned by the new idea of travel that develops in the post-war period, as critical examination of social reality and the incongruities of the modernisation process. As seen, the seemingly more hedonistic notion of travel described in *Fratelli d'Italia*, actually betrays a skilful adaptation of the motif of the Italian journey, originated with the Grand Tour, as a textual strategy to talk about present-day Italian society. In this sense, Jameson's definition of postmodern aesthetic as a cultural dominant that incorporates and re-articulates residual models and forms of cultures, may be applied to Arbasino's *Fratelli d'Italia* and its textual operation, which appropriates and re-semanticises the tradition of the Grand Tour, in a manner that is both playful and provocative. The selected travel accounts engage with the issue of Italian-ness and the tenuous sense of Italian identity, which, as was argued in Chapter 4, can be traced back to the post-unification period. Finally, the texts bear witness to the fact that, for post-war Italian writers and intellectuals, the process of discovery of the national space overlaps with self-discovery and the research of new sources of inspiration. This is perhaps most evident in the case of Ortese, who, as was seen, openly discusses the personal motives and psychological factors behind her journeying, in the introductory and concluding sections of *La lente scura*.

This final section is intended to sum up, for reasons of clarity and convenience, the findings and originality of the present study, as well as to discuss possible implications for future research. As was already stressed, the heterogenous literary sources and critical approaches that have been employed in this dissertation were functional to capturing the inconsistencies of Italy's post-war development, not only from a socio-economic and political point of view – as is the case with most of the existing research in the field¹ –, but also with specific reference to the interiority of individuals. While there are studies

¹ I refer in particular to the studies on post-war Italian society, which have been discussed in this dissertation, by historians Paul Ginsborg, Guido Crainz and John Foot.

and commentaries on post-war Italy's socio-economic changes and on Italian literary production of the time (and how they interact with one another), they are generally not based, like this research, on a close analysis of the literary texts. Moreover, existing studies on post-war Italian literature generally address a specific theme or grouping of writers, rather than providing a wider account of the Italian post-war transition, as does, instead, this dissertation, albeit through the perspective of literary geographies.² Previous studies have indeed focused on particular selections of writers, sharing a common 'identity' or interest, as in the case of women writers, writers of the *Neoavanguardia*, writers of a specific region, and historical writing, to mention but a few examples. This research project proves particularly challenging, for it addresses the complexity of a transitional period through, precisely, a complex and diversified selection of writers, rather than using the traditional organising principle, based on a coherent corpus of writings. In investigating diverse perspectives and forms of literary production, this dissertation has therefore mirrored more immediately the troubled intensity of the period under examination, in such a way as to bring into clear sight the underlying cultural patterns and anxieties.

In this dissertation, the focus on individual internalisation of post-war changes, has, for instance, illuminated the difficulty of city dwellers in becoming accustomed and adjusting to rapid transformations. This brings to mind Jameson's idea that, in contemporary globalised societies, people have yet to develop the perceptual apparatus that can allow them to navigate the postmodern hyperspace,³ together with his notion of cognitive mapping, which is precisely the attempt to address the disorientating consequences of such volatile space. Places that emerge in times of social upheaval and spatial reorganisation are therefore difficult to comprehend and accommodate, until they become part of the established landscape: in the analysis carried out in this dissertation, we have seen this, for example, through Foot's observations on the periphery as an urban area which is ever being redefined and is often perceived as Other. Moreover, amongst the texts under scrutiny in this research, such a dynamic can be detected, for instance, in the incessant roadworks that, in Bianciardi's *La vita agra*, bear witness of Milan's post-war restructuring. Hence, the fact that the examined authors write in the midst of dramatic social change partly accounts for their hostile reactions to urbanisation and

² Examples may be Jennifer Burns's work on the idea of *impegno* in Italian literature of the post-war period (and beyond), and Daniele Fioretti's *Utopia and Dystopia in Postwar Italian Literature*.

³ Jameson, p. 38.

industrialisation, as well as for the perceived fracture between Italy's rural past, allegedly connected with values of social solidarity and simplicity of life (as can be seen, for instance, in Bianciardi's nostalgic recollection of the Ribolla mining community) and the corrupted reality of post-war consumerist society. In other words, the selected authors express the temporary loss of spatial coordinates, which is figured also as a loss of intellectual, emotional and psychological coordinates.

The emphasis on the individual perspective has also exposed cultural anxiety as one of the distinguishing traits of the Italian post-war years, beyond the façade of progress and prosperity. In the novels analysed in Chapters 2 and 3, these feelings of anxiety are projected onto urban spaces, and they reverberate in different ways in each of the examined texts, as they also do in Chapter 4, perhaps most emblematically through Ortese's perception of the Italian landscape as ineffable and somewhat sinister. The examined authors draw on the modernist imagery of the city as a site of alienation and oppression, by expressing the condition of non-belonging which is at the core of urban modernity. At the same time, however, their writings document the specific context of post-war Italy and the underlying anxiety of the period, which was identified as mainly stemming from Italy's problematic relation with its past and, specifically, from the fact that the post-war governments fail to promote a critical examination of the Fascist past as a central part in the reconstruction and modernisation processes. We have also seen that anxiety can be liberating, for, among the examined authors, it triggers an interrogation of accepted modes of representation. While this is true in all of the chapters and for all of the authors analysed in this research, who are all in different ways responsible for introducing elements of novelty in post-war Italian literature, it is probably most evident in Chapter 4, with the divergent and gender-specific viewpoints of Ortese and Arbasino, which have grown out of the incipient postmodern discourse. In this regard, it is also worth noting the absence, in this dissertation, of defining literary and intellectual figures of the period under scrutiny, such as, for example, Alberto Moravia and Natalia Ginzburg, whose work has been less concerned with the immediate experience of urbanisation and industrialisation, and has generally been approached by modern scholarship in ways that differ from the angle adopted in this research, privileging existential themes and distinctive literary styles.

As mentioned above, the examined authors share the perception of the boom as historical rupture, based on a model of development and urbanisation that is not

concerned with the preservation of the past. At the same time, however, their writings reveal that, as has gradually become evident after the end of the reconstruction period, some attitudes and practices from the pre-war years have continued to exist in post-war Italian society. In the texts under scrutiny, the unprocessed past resurfaces in the environment of the booming industrial cities of the North and in the national landscape, assuming the contours of a historical uncanny. This can on occasion manifest itself as lingering totalitarian threats and feelings of estrangement that are projected onto urban spaces, the tenuous sense of national identity, patterns of exclusion and belonging within post-war Italian society and territory, and, generally speaking, through the persistence of enduring issues that weigh down on Italian society, such as the widespread corruption of the administration and political systems. The emphasis on space, and feelings of uncanniness projected onto it, shed light on such dynamics in post-war Italy, since, to put it in Lefebvre's terms, specific configurations of space can be seen as the inscription of political and economic power in a given historical moment.

What is, perhaps, most distinctive about this research, is the period of time that it embraces, which presents itself as a series of transitions that take place in several spheres of social life and in different cultural fields, though there is not a dominant discourse or a single intellectual movement that prevails. Another finding of the research was that, very much like the places that they describe, in the midst of a transformation that is not yet fully completed, the examined texts are situated at a crossroads, that of modernity and postmodernity, in that they retain some of the concerns of the modern era while anticipating the contours of the postmodern discourse. We have seen in Chapter 1 that the time frame under scrutiny in this research coincides with the slow gestation of postmodern ideas, intersecting with social and economic changes, within the somewhat fractious Italian intellectual and artistic context of the time. The resistance to postmodernism expressed within the Italian cultural debate, may be explained by looking at the dominant, conservative position in Italian criticism of the time, which Forgacs has defined as the 'Crocio-Gramscian' paradigm, drawing on a combination of historicist idealism and Marxism.⁴

The specificity of Italy in this period emerges especially in relation to other countries. After the end of the war, Italy still lags behind other industrial societies, which

⁴ David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era, 1880-1980: Cultural Industries, Politics, and the Public* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 6.

is to say, in Europe, mainly France and the UK, both in terms of socio-economic development and of a cultural and literary production that, in Italy, relies heavily on the classicist tradition. This is reflected, for instance, in the belated development of the novel in Italy, a form of literature that was long seen as inferior to poetry,⁵ in contrast with the great tradition of the bourgeois novel in France and England. Furthermore, many critics, including Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco, have looked at the US as the cradle of postmodernity, and at the American literary tradition for prototypical examples of postmodern fiction, such as most notably the novels of Pynchon and DeLillo. Nevertheless, the fact that, in Italy, the transformations of the post-war era occur with such astonishing rapidity, and that Italian culture of the time is very much defined by the inner struggle between supporters of tradition and modernisation, actually makes Italy a particularly interesting case study to investigate the development and the possible culture-specific formulations of the postmodern discourse in contemporary literature and culture.

This dissertation has offered only a possible reading of the Italian post-war years, through the analysis of some relevant literary works that were written in the surveyed period of time, supported by critical approaches developed in contemporary cultural studies, with a specific focus on theories of space. The aim of this dissertation was not to provide an all-encompassing narrative of the post-war years, but rather to document the complexity of the period, by presenting it as a controversial transition in which ambivalent processes intersect. In so doing, this research contributes to the study and understanding of that crucial historical shift by capturing some key issues and dynamics of post-war Italian society. This discussion does not exhaust the topic. In fact, many of the questions that have been raised here and could not be developed at length here for reasons of conciseness and relevance to the primary focus of the thesis, will hopefully inspire further research and reflection in the future.

I am thinking in particular of two possible axes of enquiry. On the one hand, from a synchronic perspective, it would be interesting to look at how other cities (Florence, Rome, Naples, to name but a few) develop in the same time frame, with a greater focus on the Italian Centre and South, in order to compare these urban areas with the industrialised North, and draw differences and similarities. With this in mind, the theme of the periphery, intended in the broad sense (which was partly discussed in Chapter 4),

⁵ Caesar and Caesar, p. 3. See also Ceserani and Pellini, 'The Belated Development of a Theory of the Novel in Italian Literary Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel*, ed. by Bondanella and Ciccarelli.

also deserves critical scrutiny. On the other hand, and from a diachronic point of view, Italian literature of more recent years could be considered to investigate the implications of the boom in terms of the longer history of Italian nationhood, up to the present day and, particularly, in relation to the complex socio-political situation that has characterised Italy in recent decades. While this issue was only touched upon here, the research stressed an important point, that the Italian post-war years incorporate elements of continuity with the past and, also due to the inability of the governments to tackle long-standing social issues, prepare the ground for some of the future developments in Italian society and culture. It would be interesting to examine more in detail these developments and the extent to which they are rooted in the unresolved issues of the post-war years, by adopting a similar perspective on more recent Italian literary production.

This research foreshadows the above questions in many ways. Crucially, through the corpus of literary materials that have been selected. Indeed, what has been revealed by a close analysis of the responses to the changing spaces of post-war Italy by diverse writers, who are active in this period and yet are not conventionally recognised as the leading literary voices of the time, is the intensely disruptive experience of the post-war transition, not only in terms of literary or cultural history, but also of everyday ontological and material experience of Italians of different classes, genders and professions across the peninsula. In this sense, the time frame and collection of writers explored in this dissertation, perhaps conventionally regarded as anomalous, are revealed to be crucial to a truly critical understanding of Italian culture in the post-war years and beyond, up to the present-day. One might even say that only by re-examining the Italian post-war transition through the microscopic approach that has been used in this research, can we move towards a fuller understanding of the crises of Italian nationhood that have characterised more recent decades.

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