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Rome 1945-1975
An Archaeology of Modernity

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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, Department of Italian

August 2013

Rome 1945-1975: An Archaeology of Modernity

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is the result of a collective rather than an individual effort, and owes much to the interest, the critique and the intellectual engagement of many teachers, colleagues and friends.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Loredana Polezzi. Her commitment, enthusiasm and intellectual rigour have been vital guiding threads in the course of these years of research. Special thanks are due to Dr Fabio Camilletti, who has been a source of inspirational discussions, and provided me with the seeds for many of my ideas. Many thanks are due to everyone in the Department of Italian at Warwick, especially to Dr Jenny Burns, Dr Maude Vanhaelen, Prof. Simon Gilson and Dr David Lines, who have helped me and supported me in many different ways during these years. I would also like to thank Dr Cristina Gamberi, Dr Giacomo Mannironi, Dr Joanne Lee and Harpal Singh for making the Italian Department at Warwick such a welcoming place to work.

This thesis has greatly benefitted from the guidance and the fruitful discussion with many teachers and colleagues. I am particularly indebted to Dr Lesley Caldwell, Prof. Biancamaria Frabotta, Dr Manuele Gagnolati, Prof. Keala Jewell, Dr Mario Moroni, Prof. Graziella Parati, Dr John David Rhodes, Dr Karl Schoonover, and Prof. Michelle R. Warren, for having deeply inspired me as a researcher. I profited immensely from their critical challenges, which have helped me to sharpen many of my thoughts on Rome, Pasolini, modernity, and beyond.

For the financial support I thank the Department of Italian at Warwick; the Humanities Research Centre at Warwick for a doctoral fellowship; the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding a research network on Rome's modernity, which has been crucial for the development of this study; and the Humanities Research Fund at Warwick for allowing me to export my research.

I am infinitely grateful to my mother Marilisa and my brother Francesco for their unconditioned love and support. Thanks for pushing me to dedicate most of my time to this research, even when they needed me somewhere else. I am particularly grateful to my dear friends Marco Cavietti, Knut Langewand, Nof Nasser-Eddin, Elizabeth Ramirez Soto, Giulia Sanavio, Caterina Sinibaldi and Jeanine Tuschling, not only for the intellectual discussions, but also for having shared the most meaningful life experiences in the last years. Above all, it is difficult to fully express my gratitude to Dom Holdaway, for his cunning insights, his patient and impeccable proofreading, and his intellectual integrity, which pushed me to improve this thesis every day of the last three years.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father Giuseppe Trentin, who has trained me to think through space, and has instilled in me passion for work and the ability to look for the light in the darkness.

Declaration

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

Abstract

This thesis investigates Rome as a site of modernity and an incubator of aesthetic modernism. More specifically, it analyses Rome's visual and discursive imagery during the three decades that stretch from the end of the Second World War to the 1970s. It does so through a comparative analysis of literary, cinematic and critical texts. These include novels such as Levi's *L'orologio* (1950) and Pasolini's *Petrolio* (1992); films such as Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta* (1945) and Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1959); critical texts stemming from Roman intellectual circles in journals such as *Rinascita*, *La strada*, *Presente*, and *Nuovi argomenti*; and historical analyses of Rome's urban development such as those of Benevolo, Insolera, Cederna, and Vidotto.

The aim of this study is twofold. On the one hand it challenges traditional readings of Rome as an anti-modern or pre-modern urban entity (i.e. the myth of the 'Eternal City'), which was generated during the Grand Tour and has continued to inform academic scholarship on Rome. On the other, it shows that Rome lies at the centre of extremely significant constellations of modern images and discourses which can be compared to most studied examples of urban modernity such as Paris, London, Berlin or New York.

From a methodological perspective, this thesis delves into Foucault's notion of 'Archaeology'. Instead of analysing texts in a strictly philological way, attempting to detect their affiliation or their belonging to specific traditions, this thesis investigates its sources as symptoms of history's movements. Instead of framing Rome through traditional categories such as 'Eternal City' or 'Modern Hell', this archaeological analysis suggests the coexistence of three discursive formations of Rome's modern image, which are based on the concepts of *fleetingness*, *dilation* and *entropy*. These three terms inform the three sections of the thesis. Furthermore, it argues that Rome represents a case of 'anachronistic' modernity that might allow us to depart from canonical interpretations of Italian modernity as 'backward'.

Introduction: An Archaeology of Rome's Modernity

The experience of modernity and modernization [...] happened in the streets, the homes, the factories, in the political and economic system, on the battlefield and in the world order.

Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane

Processes of Western urban modernization have triggered some of the most productive intellectual debates, philosophical investigations and cultural transformations over the last two centuries. Edgar Allan Poe's representation of the London crowds, Charles Baudelaire's and Walter Benjamin's allegorical gaze trained on Paris's street-corners, Friedrich Engels's observations on London's 'metropolization', George Simmel's analysis of the psychology of the modern individual as blasé, or the rise of the cinematic myths of New York and Los Angeles are only some of the most obvious examples of the vast and heterogeneous literature which has emerged from the transformation of the city into an indefinite urban and suburban agglomeration.¹ As these examples suggest, cultural-historical investigations of Western urban modernity have recognized Paris and London as the canonical capitals of nineteenth-century modernity, New York as the capital of twentieth-century modernity, and Los Angeles as a paradigm for postmodernity.²

¹ See Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Man of the Crowd', in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by Charles F. Richardson, 10 vols (New York: Cosimo, 2009), IV, pp. 159-73; Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, trans. by P. E. Charvet (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1981), pp. 390-436; Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999); Friedrich Engels, *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. and trans. by Kurt Wolff (London: Collier-MacMillan, 1950). For a discussion of cinematic New York and Los Angeles in relation to modernity and the noir genre see Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

² For example, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane argue that modernism is based on a central and a peripheral axis. The former corresponds to the triangle between Paris, London and New York, while the latter includes the cases of Berlin, Vienna, St Petersburg, Prague or Copenhagen. See Malcolm Bradbury

At the same time, the position of Rome in the broad discursive field of urban modernity has remained extremely peripheral: the Italian capital is generally absent from case studies devoted to the modern city, particularly within investigations of its cultural, literary and cinematic representations.³ Academic scholarship in literary, film and cultural studies has rather focused primarily on Rome's pre-modern identity: it is a commonplace to refer to Rome (even contemporary Rome) as the 'Eternal City' – a definition that limits the city's image to the classical heritage of its historical centre.⁴ Within this type of discourse, Rome emerges as one of the least modern or postmodern among Western capitals, insofar as the sense of eternity and universality stemming from its cityscape clashes against those processes of fragmentation, ephemerality and fleetingness which are intrinsic to any discussion of modernity and postmodernity.

The overarching aim of this thesis is to challenge and problematize the assumption that Rome and urban modernity are incompatible. Instead, I will show that Rome is a key site of modernity and modernism, and that the city has been at the centre of extremely significant constellations of modern images and discourses. I will do so with reference to a corpus of selected texts – mainly literary, but also cinematic, critical and theoretical – which, I argue, may help us to delineate the rise of a rich and theoretically dense response to modernity from the perspective of Rome. In this respect, this thesis

and James McFarlane, 'The Name and Nature of Modernism', in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 19-56 (p. 36).

³ Rome never appears as a case study within volumes on modernism and the city, either from a literary or a cultural studies perspective. See, for example, Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism', in *Modernism, A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, ed. by Bradbury and McFarlane, pp. 96-104; Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Burton Pike, *The Image of the Modern City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

⁴ The legacy of classical Rome is a highly debated topic in academic scholarship. For a brief bibliography on the theme see Catharine Edwards, *Writing Rome: Textual Approaches to the City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Catharine Edwards, *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); *Rome the Cosmopolis*, ed. by Catharine Edwards and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); *The Legacy of Rome: A New Appraisal*, Richard Jenkyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); *The Sites of Rome: Time, Space, Memory*, ed. by David Larmour and Diana Spencer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

seeks to demonstrate that Rome corresponds, perhaps even more than Paris, to Charles Baudelaire's argument that modernity is characterized by 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable'.⁵ As I shall seek to demonstrate, in fact, the immovable image of Rome's classical legacy dramatically clashes with the need for rationalization and neo-liberalization brought about by the modernization project undertaken since the city became Italy's capital in 1871.

The chronological boundaries of this study extend from the end of the Second World War to the 1970s. The decision to focus on these three decades has a two-fold motivation. The first reason is methodological, and is based on the need to segment the analysis of such a long, intricate and complex process, observing its effects within a relatively limited but significant period and a corresponding corpus of texts. The second is historical: it is precisely in these three decades that Rome enters a high-capitalist and neo-liberal phase of development, moving from the compact structure of the fascist city to the borderless 'oil-slick' of the 1970s metropolis, while at the same time doubling the number of its inhabitants to almost three million. In other terms, I focus on a time period which corresponds to the movement between Rome's modernity and postmodernity.

In this regard, the chronology followed by this study is compatible with David Harvey's argument that the period 1945-1973 was characterized by 'a certain set of labour control practices, technological mixes, consumption habits and configurations of political-economic power' which follows a Fordist-Keynesian paradigm of progress.⁶ In Rome, this phase corresponds to the city's postwar expansion, which causes the break

⁵ Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', p. 403.

⁶ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 124.

between the centre and the periphery.⁷ After 1973, the Fordist-Keynesian paradigm of development appears to break up, and to pave the way to ‘a period of rapid change, flux, and uncertainty’,⁸ which we can understand through the concept of ‘postmodernity’. Rome’s postmodern shift can be grasped in its different urban organization, which from the 1970s follows a paradigm of sprawl ‘che fa perdere il significato alla precedente contrapposizione tra centro e periferia’.⁹ Thus, while a comprehensive cultural history of Rome’s modernity and postmodernity should include the liberal city emerging from Italy’s unification, the fascist city of the ‘ventennio’, and the dispersed and gentrified city which emerges with the post-industrial shift, this study focuses specifically on Rome’s late-modern shift, with an eye to its movement from modernity to postmodernity.

In this respect, the first important assumption of this thesis is that after the end of the Second World War Rome underwent a process of loss of its universal identity (the topos of the ‘Eternal City’, firmly rooted in the city’s representations at least from the Grand Tour onwards, if not far earlier), and that this loss triggered the emergence of a more fragmentary as well as fleeting aesthetic and imagery. While the myth of the ‘Eternal City’ was never entirely displaced, it increasingly co-existed with substantially different visions of the city and of its transformation. As I will demonstrate, in the course of this process, Rome has been articulated within a binary opposition between the glory of its pre-modern image and the squalor of its modern one. Within this discursive formation, Rome is constructed as a field of tension caught between the beauty of its past image –

⁷ Cf. Roberto Cassetti, ‘Il ruolo delle “funzioni centrali” nella costruzione di un nuovo ordine urbano della città contemporanea’, in *Roma contemporanea: storia e progetto*, ed. by Roberto Cassetti and Gianfranco Spagnesi (Rome: Gangemi, 2006), pp. 67-107. As Cassetti writes, between the 1940s and the 1970s, Rome ‘si spezza decisamente tra centro e periferia, quest’ultima oramai polverizzata in una pluralità di tessuti diversi, separati l’uno dall’altro da spazi liberi, ciascuno con le proprie regole compositive’ (p. 70).

⁸ Harvey, p. 124.

⁹ Cassetti, p. 70.

that of the ‘Eternal City’ – and the degradation of its modern development – the ugliness of its peripheries, the corruption of its political classes, etc.

This process of dichotomic narrowing of Rome’s semantic meaning is shared by a vast corpus of texts including tourist guides, journalism, travel writing and other genres. Evidence of it can also be found within academic scholarship on Rome. Peter Bondanella’s *The Eternal City: Roman Images in the Modern World* is paradigmatic in this regard.¹⁰ In spite of the fact that the book, as the title says, aims to analyse ‘Roman images’ in the modern world, what it does instead is to investigate the legacy that the myth of ancient Rome has had throughout the centuries. Hence, the ‘Roman’ of the title refers strictly to the images produced by the city’s pre-modern identity, and does not include any modernist imagery. In Bondanella’s account, Rome – the ‘Eternal City’ – is simply what remains of its classical image.

Moving to anthropology, Michael Herzfeld’s *Evicted from Eternity* refers to Rome as a city threatened by the process of gentrification caused by the neo-liberal policies implemented during the 1990s and 2000s.¹¹ For Herzfeld, the neo-liberal turn of Rome led to the destruction of the traditional social fabric of Monti, one of Rome’s oldest and most picturesque neighbourhoods. Although, in simplifying his argument, I am doing little justice to the author’s engaging account of this process, what seems limiting in Herzfeld’s analysis is that, for him, Rome risks losing its ‘eternal’ features, and this loss would be tantamount to the loss of Rome itself. As he writes: ‘Here, eternally, eternity continues to fracture and to coalesce, repeatedly and without rest; for such, paradoxically, is the eternity of the Eternal City. It seems still that no bureaucratic hand can yet stay the corruption, at once and forever corrosive and creative, of time. When

¹⁰ Peter Bondanella, *The Eternal City: Roman Images in the Modern World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

¹¹ Michael Herzfeld, *Evicted from Eternity: The Restructuring of Modern Rome* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009).

and if it succeeds, Rome will no longer be Rome'.¹² As with Bondanella, Rome's contemporary identity is considered by Herzfeld solely in relation to the symbolic value expressed by its classical image.

Richard Bosworth's *The Whispering City: Modern Rome And Its Histories* appears to provide a more open understanding of the signifier 'Rome', although ultimately the volume does not take into account Rome as a location of modernity.¹³ Like Bondanella and Herzfeld, Bosworth also uses the 'Eternal City' as synonymous with Rome: 'The Eternal City [...] is a place where, perhaps more so than in any other site of human memory, the meanings of history have always been debated. To any who will stop and listen, Rome whispers with many pasts'.¹⁴ Bosworth's Rome is a Rome where many cities coexist on one site, but these different cities are always considered bound to the mutations of the capital's classical heritage, while its modern and peripheral components are never properly addressed. As he writes, '[Rome] remains a wonderful site of memory and heritage, myth and histories'.¹⁵

Italian scholars and intellectuals do address more explicitly Rome's modern development, however they often seem unable to go beyond a one-dimensional argumentation based on a negative, sometimes apocalyptic, analysis of the city's modernity. Such a reading is shared by, among others, writers like Alberto Moravia and Ercole Patti, urban historians such as Leonardo Benevolo and Antonio Cederna, and literary scholars such as Mario Praz and Eugenio Ragni. While their work will be discussed more extensively in the sixth chapter of this thesis, it may be worth highlighting here some of these authors' descriptions of the city in order to understand more clearly the limitations inherent in this reading of Rome's modernity. Alberto

¹² Herzfeld, p. 312.

¹³ See Richard J. B. Bosworth, *Whispering City: Modern Rome and Its Histories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Bosworth, p. xiii.

¹⁵ Bosworth, p. 301.

Moravia's introduction to the volume *Contro Roma* is remarkably symptomatic in this regard. Here, the author provides an account of Rome's urban map constructed in rigidly dichotomic terms. According to Moravia:

Fisicamente, Roma [...] ha conservato il suo piccolo centro monumentale sempre più eroso e più insignificante e ha creato intorno a questo centro degli immensi quartieri (per esempio: Centocelle ha 250.000 abitanti) che però non si possono chiamare veramente popolari. Sono i quartieri della cosiddetta periferia, intendendo con questa parola quell'aggregazione meccanica sterile della provincia alla città [...]. Questi quartieri sono tra le cose più brutte del mondo intero e fanno della Roma nuova, cioè di quattro quinti della città, un orrore urbanistico paragonabile soltanto a certe città asiatiche o latinoamericane cresciute troppo in fretta e in un regime di spietata e cannibalesca speculazione edilizia.¹⁶

Moravia's opposition between Rome's city centre – depicted as the only meaningful site of the city – and the horrible anonymity of the periphery – an ugly place which can be only described negatively – is exemplary of the way in which the notion of modern Rome has circulated for decades in a variety of texts. For Moravia, Rome's modernity appears as a unitary process which has only produced ugly, horrible buildings. Such a description can easily be coupled with Leonardo Benevolo's statement that Rome's modern urban development is 'una folle avventura da chiudere'.¹⁷ For Benevolo, as well as for Moravia, the construction of modern Rome from 1870 onwards has brought about 'una rovina continua e inarrestabile, che sembra l'ultima manifestazione del destino storico dominante di questa città: scontare all'infinito, nell'abbandono o nel caos, i fasti di un passato troppo glorioso'.¹⁸

What we see emerging here is a highly contradictory paradigm of the 'signifier' Rome: on the one side, Rome is still the 'Eternal City' – a beautiful classical structure which, in Bondanella's words, 'constitutes a fundamental psychical entity for Western

¹⁶ Alberto Moravia, 'Introduzione: delusione di Roma', in Dario Bellezza et al, *Contro Roma* (Milan: Bompiani, 1975), pp. 7-18 (p. 11).

¹⁷ Leonardo Benevolo, *Roma dal 1870 al 1990* (Bari: Laterza, 1992), p. 177.

¹⁸ Benevolo, p. vii.

civilization [and] has served as both father and mother to us all';¹⁹ on the other it is just a sort of modernist hell made of concrete, in Cederna's words 'un unico tavoliere di cemento, uno stomachevole, soffocante magma di "palazzine"'.²⁰ Yet, in spite of their superficial differences, both of these narratives of Rome respond to the same traditionalist matrix, in which the 'authentic' Rome is represented by the pre-modern city, while modern Rome is a fake, or is simply not worthy of any attention.

This thesis constitutes an attempt to open up the semantic meaning of the signifier 'Rome' to modernity without falling into a binary and Manichean approach. It should be noted here that I am not trying to invalidate any of the studies mentioned above, which have shed important light on specific aspects of Rome's history. Rather, my objective is to question a specific way of using the term 'Rome': something which, using Michel Foucault's terminology, I propose to call the 'discursive formation' of Rome's modernity.²¹ What I intend to argue is that the establishment of such a rigid opposition between the supposed glory of past Rome and the equally supposed degradation of its present limits our ability to look at and to study Rome as a site of modernity. In order to oppose this one-dimensional interpretation of Rome's modernity, throughout this thesis I will seek to argue that Rome is not just the 'Eternal City', but rather that it has *also* expressed, embodied and represented a very peculiar, interesting and complex site of modern and modernist experiences, aesthetics and thoughts.

¹⁹ Bondanella, p. 7.

²⁰ Antonio Cederna, *Mirabilia urbis: cronache romane, 1957-1965* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), p. viii.

²¹ See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 77: 'A discursive formation will be individualized if one can define the system of formation of the different strategies that are deployed in it; in other words, if one can show how they all derive (in spite of their sometimes extreme diversity, and in spite of their dispersion in time) from the same set of relations'.

i. Rome's Modernity: The Clash between the Weight of the Past and Rights of the Future

The creation of such a rigid and limited pattern of interpretation can be traced back to the traumatic passage from the 'Second Rome' – the capital of a religious institution such as the Catholic Church – to the 'Third Rome' – the capital of a (more or less) secularized nation such as the new-born Italian Kingdom. After 1871, what had been the headquarters of the universal and anti-modernist institution of the Catholic Church was suddenly forced to re-think itself as the administrative capital of a European state which, in turn, had to undertake a process of liberal modernization in order to occupy a more important role within the European context.²² When Rome became Italy's capital, Paris and London were already big metropolises with a population of, respectively, 1,800,000²³ and 3,200,000 inhabitants,²⁴ and were characterized by a very heterogeneous and stratified social structure as well as a competitive economy which combined industries and services. Rome, on the other hand, was a town of about 200.000 inhabitants,²⁵ without any substantial industries, almost entirely lacking in public services, and with a medieval social structure. Furthermore, its inhabited area was just a small portion of its ancient perimeter represented by the Aurelian Walls and its population was composed of a small number of aristocrats, some clerks and a vast mass of people living off expedients (the so-called 'popolino romano').²⁶ As Vidotto

²² See Vittorio Vidotto, *Roma contemporanea* (Bari: Laterza, 2006), p. 3.

²³ Official statistics of Paris' demographical history can be found at Anon., 'Paris Arrondissements: Post 1860 Population and Population Density', *Demographia.com*, 2001, online: <<http://www.demographia.com/db-paris-arr1999.htm>> [accessed 31 July 2013].

²⁴ Official statistics of London's demographical history can be found at Anon., 'Greater London, Inner London and Outer London: Population History', *Demographia.com*, 2001, online: <<http://www.demographia.com/dm-lon31.htm>> [accessed 31 July 2013].

²⁵ ISTAT statistics of Rome's demographical history can be found at Anon., 'Censimenti popolazione Roma 1871-2011', *Tuttitalia.it*, online: <<http://www.tuttitalia.it/lazio/33-roma/statistiche/censimenti-popolazione>> [accessed 31 July 2013].

²⁶ For a historical account of Rome's socio-economical situation at the time of Italy's unification see Claudio Pavone, *Gli inizi di Roma capitale* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2011) and Vidotto, pp. 3-71.

argues, in 1870, Rome ‘appariva ancora per molti aspetti, economici e sociali, come una città dell’ancien régime’.²⁷

However, what Rome did have, unlike its European counterparts, was its ancient lineage, which was materialized in the symbolic value of its past. Thus, from the day it became the Italian capital, on 3rd February 1871, Rome started its process of modernization with both a superiority and an inferiority complex: the former stemming from the glories of its past, which the Grand Tour tradition had helped to canonize, the latter deriving from its limited modern status.²⁸ Traces of this contradiction can be found in the different ways in which Samuele Alatri (a member of the newly established Italian parliament) and Luigi Pianciani (the first mayor of liberated Rome) commented on Rome’s new capital status. While for Alatri ‘Roma non sarà mai la Parigi d’Italia’, in that the differences between the rich and modern French capital and Rome were too deep and marked to be overcome,²⁹ Pianciani underlined how:

alle esigenze della moderna civiltà, ai bisogni, conseguenza del progresso sociale, ai calcoli [sic] degl’interessi diretti da sani principii economici, ai suoi doveri verso la nazione si aggiungono i doveri verso sé stessa che discendono dal suo passato. È veramente il caso di ripetere *noblesse oblige*: essa [Roma] non può contentarsi di non avere a monumento di grandezza se non che memorie da museo.³⁰

Thus, for Pianciani, Rome faced the unique task of pursuing a modern pattern of development while at the same time preserving intact, as in a museum, the signs and traces of its glorious past.

Alatri’s and Pianciani’s statements can be read as symptomatic of two alternative perspectives on the way to interpret Rome’s modern course. The clash between these two impulses – the need for the capital of the nation to lead the development for the

²⁷ Vidotto, p. 17.

²⁸ For a cultural-historical analysis of the Grand Tour in Rome see Antonio Pinelli, *Souvenir. L’industria dell’antico e il Grand Tour a Roma* (Bari: Laterza, 2010).

²⁹ Alatri quoted in Vidotto, p. 67.

³⁰ Luigi Pianciani, *Diciotto mesi di amministrazione comunale* (Rome: Tipografia del Don Pirloncino, 1874), p. 6.

entire country, and the duty of the city to preserve and keep visible the traces of its noble origins – constitutes the bipolar marker which characterized Rome's patterns of modernization in the decades which followed Italy's unification. In a sense, it could be said that, in different forms and with different aims, the process of modernization pursued and represented by Rome since 1871 responded to the fracture between the need for a modern future and the right to an ancient past.

This temporal dissociation embedded in the idea of modern Rome emerged immediately after the decision to move the Italian capital from Florence to Rome in 1871, and continued to haunt the city throughout the political and historical periods that followed that choice, functioning as an invisible matrix for its modern growth. What I am suggesting here is not that the collapsing of Rome's modernity from 1871 onwards should be read as a linear and monolithic process, which simply responded to the attempt to combine the needs of a functional contemporary city with the supposed glories of its past, but rather that the difficult relationship and the clashes between these two opposite sets of demands have come to represent the inescapable poles in all subsequent debates on how to modernize Rome. This tension is clearly visible in the plans of Quintino Sella, who was one of the most proactive advocates of Rome's modernization in the post-unification period. Sella explicitly attempted to link Rome's paradigm of modernization to the city's glorious past. As he wrote in a letter to Biagio Miraglia, on 7 January 1875:

Perché non riallacciare la storia di Roma dal 20 settembre (1870) sino alla fondazione della città, passando alla Roma papale, imperiale, repubblicana? Perché non sarebbe a Roma Vittorio Emanuele l'ultimo (intendo l'ultimo nel senso di recente) dei reggitori di Roma cominciando da Romolo? Il *Calendario di Roma* acquisterà un grandissimo interesse se vi sarà una cronologia dei reggitori, dei fatti, delle leggi proprie.³¹

³¹ Quintino Sella, *Epistolario*, ed. by Guido and Marisa Quazza, 7 vols (Rome: Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1980-1991), V, p. 7.

The different plans for the modernization of Rome pursued by the governments of liberal Italy (1870-1922), by Mussolini (1922-1943), and then by the Christian Democrat leaders in the postwar period all aimed to provide a specific solution to the issue of Rome's modern development, while at the same time finding a compromise between the idea of universality stemming from Rome's past and the secularized and functionalist needs of a modern metropolis. A clear marker of this same tension can be found in the processes of 'sventramento' of the city pursued by the modernizers of both the liberal and the fascist periods: the opening up of wide modern boulevards such as via Cavour or via dell'Impero was accompanied by the pressure to foreground and monumentalize the traces of the city's ancient heritage. As argued by Mario Sanfilippo, 'in entrambe le epoche (liberale e fascista) lo sventramento dei quartieri medievali, rinascimentali e barocchi si accompagna sempre al malinteso senso del recupero monumentale'.³² In other words, Rome had to be both ancient and modern, and this split marked the trajectory of the city's development.

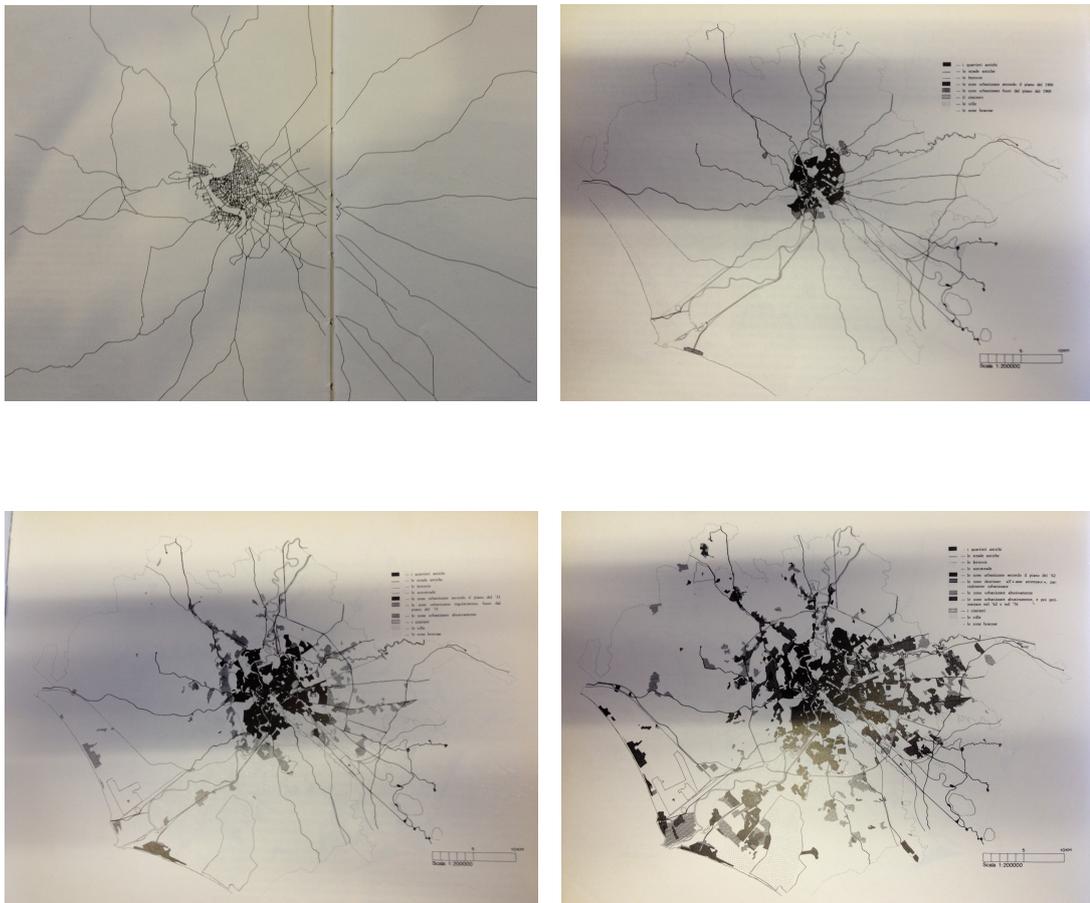
ii. Rome's Modern Map: Historical Periodization

Urban historians generally discuss Rome's development in relation to changes in the city's topography. Mario Sanfilippo, for example, divides the process of Rome's modern growth into three phases. The first goes from 1870 to 1945, and responds to Rome's process of consolidation, where 'La capitale burocratico-centralistica è costantemente cresciuta in modo omogeneo e compatto, dai rioni intramurari, e alla fine degli anni Trenta, la città consolidata dei rioni e dei quartieri raggiunge l'apice della popolazione'.³³ The second phase spans the years between 1945 and 1970, and follows

³² Mario Sanfilippo, *Le tre città di Roma: lo sviluppo urbano dalle origini a oggi* (Bari: Laterza, 1993), p. 96.

³³ Mario Sanfilippo, *La costruzione di una capitale, Roma 1945-1991* (Roma: Silvana Editoriale, 1994), p. 10.

the city's centrifugal movement towards the countryside. In Sanfilippo's words, during this period '[s]i verifica il primo grande decremento demico dei rioni e dei quartieri immediatamente adiacenti, mentre il baricentro demico si sposta verso i quartieri esterni e le nuove periferie'.³⁴ The third period, which we could define in terms of postmodernity, goes from the 1970s to the 1990s and consists of the suburban spreading of Rome well beyond its traditional map. According to Sanfilippo, 'in questa fase si è verificata la dispersione; frammentazione progressiva dell'abitato nelle aree dell'antico suburbia e dell'Agro Romano, anche al di là del Grande Raccordo Anulare'.³⁵



Figs. 0.1-0.4: Snapshots of Rome's Map in 1870 (fig. 0.1), 1909 (fig. 0.2), 1931 (fig. 0.3), and 1976 (fig. 0.4)

³⁴ Sanfilippo, *La costruzione di una capitale*, p. 10.

³⁵ Ibid.

Sanfilippo's framing of Rome's modernization in terms of 'consolidation', 'centrifugal movement' and 'suburban spread' is particularly interesting since it could be read as a description of the changes that the map of Rome and its demographics have undergone from the 1870 onwards. While in 1870 Rome was still a relatively small town of about two hundred thousand inhabitants (fig. 0.1), its buildings covering only a small portion of the area within the Aurelian Walls, during the following decades the city progressively filled every free space within this perimeter. The first attempt to govern and systematize the growth of the new Italian capital was the master plan ('piano regolatore') approved in 1873, which aimed to 'estendere la fabbricazione di tutte le lacune dell'esistente abitato',³⁶ and to implement the construction of a series of new roads and residential areas. This plan opened the way for the construction of new roads and the building of the surrounding spaces, including via Nazionale, piazzale Indipendenza, the Viminale, piazza Vittorio, via Labicana, Testaccio, Prati, piazza Cavour, and via Cola di Rienzo.³⁷ The paradigm of the 'sventramento', which responds to a logic of 'necessary modernization' and subsequent 'monumentalization' of ancient heritage, was inaugurated in this period and continued to characterize projects for the development of Rome throughout the phase of the city's urban 'consolidation', which reached its peak during the fascist years. The successive master plans approved in 1883 and 1909 constituted, from a topographical perspective, a sort of continuation and re-adjustment of the previous project. This phase, as noted by Sanfilippo, also saw the construction of Rome's first peripheral areas, which included Testaccio and San Lorenzo, as well as a residential area near the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (fig. 0.2).³⁸

³⁶ Quoted in Italo Insolera, *Roma moderna: un secolo di storia urbanistica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1962), p. 27.

³⁷ See Insolera, *Roma moderna*, p. 26.

³⁸ However, as underlined by Insolera, the construction of these areas met many difficulties and the ambitions of the original plans underwent a series of adjustments. See Insolera, *Roma moderna*, in particular the chapter 'La formazione della prima periferia', pp. 63-75.

During the years between 1922 and 1943 Rome's appearance changed quite drastically as a consequence of demolitions in the city centre (the most important of which occurred around Largo Argentina and the Augusteum, on the Capitol Hill, and in front of the Vatican for the opening of via della Conciliazione) (fig. 0.3). 1937 also saw the beginning of the construction of the E42, a new monumental and residential area of Rome later renamed EUR.³⁹ As already mentioned, the paradigm of the 'sventramento' (and the subsequent transferral of the population from the city centre to new peripheral areas built outside the perimeter of the old city) represented an element of continuity between liberal and fascist Italy. However, fascism radicalized the demolitions according to a twofold logic of cleansing and grandeur.⁴⁰ This attitude emerges clearly from one of Mussolini's first speeches on Rome, in which he established that 'Roma non può, non deve essere soltanto una città moderna, nel senso ormai banale della parola, deve essere una città degna della sua gloria'.⁴¹

In 1945, at the end of this long process of urban consolidation, Rome was an urban entity by now drastically different from the anti-modern ancient town which the Italian troops had conquered in 1870. It was a metropolis with a population of one and a half million inhabitants, which filled and stretched its ancient perimeter, and was surrounded by a relatively big peripheral belt. Still following Sanfilippo's model, we notice that from 1945 to the early 1970s Rome's map continued to grow, reaching far beyond the Aurelian Walls and spreading in accordance with the neo-liberal logic of the 'metropoli spontanea'.⁴² The lack of planning, in spite of the approval of three different 'piani regolatori' (1962, 1965 and 1967), produced the image of a disordered, discontinuous and incoherent city. During these years, various housing projects funded with both

³⁹ Cf. Italo Insolera, *Roma fascista nelle foto dell'istituto Luce* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2001), in particular pp. 225-44.

⁴⁰ Cf. Sanfilippo, *La costruzione di una capitale*, p. 37.

⁴¹ Quoted in Insolera, *Roma fascista*, p. 7.

⁴² See Alberto Clementi and Francesco Perego (eds), *La metropoli spontanea* (Bari: Dedalo, 1983).

public and private money (among others the INA Casa, the Unrra-Casas, the Icp) led to the construction of new residential areas which eventually formed entire new neighbourhoods, such as the Tiburtino, the Tuscolano, San Paolo, Torre Spaccata, Acilia, Villa Gordiani and the area around via Nomentana.⁴³ In this period the city underwent something of a topographical fracturing which brought about a division between the compact city that had emerged from the overlapping of the ancient city with the projects of modernization pursued by liberal and fascist administrators and the centrifugal city which was now swiftly spreading around Rome's modern belt.⁴⁴ During the three decades which follow the end of the Second World War Rome's map changes more than in any other comparable period of its millennial history: its urban area expands like an oil-stain, while its population almost doubles from around 1,500,000 in the mid 1940s to around 2,700,000 in the early 1970s (fig. 0.4).⁴⁵

In parallel with these urban and demographic transformations, what also changed was the idea of modernity associated with Rome. As we have seen, the 'monumentalist' paradigm of development set by the modernizers of liberal and fascist Rome led to the erasure of those elements which were not considered worthy of its ancient heritage. The paradigm of modernity that followed the second postwar period, on the other hand, originated as a reaction to the demolitions carried out within the city centre in the previous decades and led to a splitting of the city into two non-communicating entities. From 1945 onwards, Rome's historical city was preserved from any further change, and it became a crystal frozen in time. Conversely, the new areas of development which were located outside the limits of the ancient city started to multiply very rapidly and without any urban or architectural relation to the city centre. The lack of coordination and communication between Rome's city centre and the urban interventions in the

⁴³ See Vidotto, *Roma contemporanea*, pp. 278-89.

⁴⁴ See Benevolo, pp. 109-77.

⁴⁵ See Maria Filomena Boeri and Carlo Maria Travaglini, *Roma dall'alto* (Rome: Università degli Studi Roma Tre Croma, 2006), p. 31.

peripheries triggered a process of detachment of the ancient and the modern city, which led to a dissociated idea of development, in which the modern was paired with ugliness and the ancient with beauty. This process of symbolic detachment between tradition and modernity can be visually observed by comparing the areas of Rome built from 1870 to 1943 with those built after the end of the war. While the architecture of areas such as piazza Vittorio, Prati or the E42 is characterized by the attempt to reinterpret in different ways (neo-classical, neo-baroque, rationalist) the classical ideal stemming from Rome's ancient past, neighbourhoods such as the Tuscolano or the Tiburtino follow a purely functionalist paradigm of construction.

iii. Roman Modernity / Roman Modernism

As mentioned above, this thesis will focus on the imagery and the discourses surrounding Rome's late-modern shift from 1945 to the 1970s. While, in their different ways, the city's liberal and fascist modernizers had based their projects of development on the proclaimed need to revive Rome's universal image, such an ambition never became a matter of concern for the city's postwar modernizers. As Vidotto argues 'L'idea di una Roma carica di storia millenaria e per questo votata a una missione nel mondo era finita forse per sempre. Nessuna delle forze politiche dell'Italia postbellica avrebbe cercato di rivendicarla o di rinverdirla'.⁴⁶ The way in which I propose to frame this 'fading away' of Rome's millennial and universal mission is through an analysis which draws on Baudelaire's definition of modernity as a fleeting, transient and ephemeral experience, and Benjamin's argument about the loss of the aura in the age of mechanical reproduction.⁴⁷ I will attempt to show that the period between 1945 and the

⁴⁶ Vidotto, p. 256.

⁴⁷ See the discussion of modernity as a process of movement from fixed/classical/eternal values to contingent and transient ones in Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', and Walter Benjamin's discussion of the loss of aura as an intrinsic characteristic of technological modernization in 'The Work of

early 1970s constitutes a moment in which Rome's image undergoes an important paradigm shift characterized by the emergence of a modernist aesthetic and a corresponding imagery stemming from the metropolization of its cityscape.⁴⁸

In order to understand the implications of Rome's loss of universality and eternity, as well as their relevance for the development of the city's modern image, it may be worth clarifying at this point the ways in which the terms 'modernity' and 'modernism' are used in this thesis. My interpretation of the concept of modernity refers to the post-Enlightenment fracture which occurred in Western societies between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, and which largely persisted throughout the twentieth century before mutating into what cultural analysts have called the postmodern period.⁴⁹ My understanding of modernism is intertwined with the artistic and cultural responses to the industrial development of the capitalist logic, which led to the rationalization of production processes, the implementation of new technology, the increased division of labour, the growing role of discipline, the shift of the economy from agriculture to industry, the growth of migratory flows from rural to urban areas and the subsequent rise of the modern metropolis, as well as, in the arts, the de-structuring of formal and traditional aesthetic principles in favour of experimental ones. In this respect, I share Joche Schulte-Sasse's view that 'we need a term that refers solely to the social dimension of modern societies and a separate one that refers to the

Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt and trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), pp. 217-52.

⁴⁸ This shift has also been observed by Asor Rosa and Cicchetti, who noticed how in the postwar period: 'La capitale si mitizza ancora una volta, ma questa volta come luogo della sofferenza, delle contraddizioni e della corruzione. Un vero "modello" insomma, che tenta di imporsi a livello nazionale, lottando con il "politecnicismo" avanguardistico di Milano e il razionalismo illuministico di Torino attirando nella propria sfera d'influenza il populismo meridionalistico'. See Alberto Asor Rosa and Angelo Cicchetti, 'Roma', in *Letteratura italiana. Storia e geografia*, 3 vols, ed. by Alberto Asor Rosa (Turin: Einaudi, 1989), III, pp. 547-652 (p. 637).

⁴⁹ A bibliography on the notions of postmodernity would be practically endless. The most important points of reference for this thesis are David Harvey's aforementioned *The Condition of Postmodernity*; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991); Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

cultural movements within these societies'.⁵⁰ Thus, modernity 'would mean a form of social organization'⁵¹ while modernism indicates 'the cultural precipitates of this socio-historical period'.⁵²

In this thesis the use of the concepts of modernity and modernism is historico-materialist and aims to contextualize my object of study within a specific tradition of thought whose intention is to re-interpret Marxism from a cultural-theoretical perspective. This tradition encompasses specific strains of twentieth-century thought, which include: 1. German discourses on modernity – from the tradition of Max Weber to the Frankfurt School, in particular Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, the unorthodox Frankfurtist Walter Benjamin, and Hannah Arendt;⁵³ 2. French post-structuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, who analysed the rise and development of modernity as a process of surveillance and control, particularly focusing on notions of power and temporality;⁵⁴ 3. the re-organization and re-elaboration of these traditions proposed by late twentieth-century American scholars like Fredric Jameson and David Harvey;⁵⁵ 4. Italian contemporary thought, in particular Giorgio Agamben's re-elaborations of both French and German theorists' notions of

⁵⁰ Jochen Schulte-Sasse, 'Modernity and Modernism, Postmodernity and Postmodernism: Framing the Issue', *Cultural Critique*, 5 (1986-1987), 5-22.

⁵¹ Schulte-Sasse, p. 6.

⁵² Schulte-Sasse, p. 6.

⁵³ See in particular Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1973); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998); Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* and *Illuminations*; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁵⁴ See in particular Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. by Tom Conley (London: Athlone Press, 1993); Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1986); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1989); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79*, trans. by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

⁵⁵ See Jameson and Harvey.

power and modernity.⁵⁶ In particular, what this thesis shares with the German and American tradition of thought is the attempt to link cultural products to the socio-political superstructure: novels, films, poems are not simply ‘works of art’ but function as seismographic markers of history’s movements. At the same time, what I share with the French and Italian traditions of thought on modernity is the belief in the intimate relationship between the production of power and the production of forms of life, specifically as articulated through notions of biopower and biopolitics. In spite of their theoretical differences, what unites these traditions is their understanding of modernity as a process which frustrates specific positivistic strains of Enlightenment thought, turning it into a process of instrumental rationality.

Two other important works which inform my reading of modernity and cultural responses to it are Marshall Berman’s *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*⁵⁷ and Georges Didi-Huberman’s *Ninfa moderna: saggio sul pannello caduto*,⁵⁸ Specifically, Berman’s book sheds light on the complexities and the contradictions of modernity, which he defines as an experience that ‘exploits and torments us, brings our energies and imaginations to life, drives us to grasp and confront the world that modernization makes, and to strive to make it our own’.⁵⁹ Quoting Marx, Berman defines modernity as the belief that ‘All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away [...]. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned’.⁶⁰ What is particularly interesting for me in Berman’s account of modernity as a process which brings about a profanation of traditional and idealist

⁵⁶ See in particular Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995); Giorgio Agamben, *Infanzia e storia: distruzione dell’esperienza e origine della storia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978); Giorgio Agamben, *Quel che resta di Auschwitz: l’archivio e il testimone* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998); Giorgio Agamben, *Stato di eccezione* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003).

⁵⁷ Marshall Berman, *All that Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988).

⁵⁸ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ninfa moderna: saggio sul pannello caduto*, trans. by Aurelio Pino (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2004).

⁵⁹ Berman, p. 348.

⁶⁰ Karl Marx quoted in Berman, p. 21.

values is the possibility of linking such a process to Rome's loss of universality.

Conversely, Didi-Huberman's work shows us how to think of modernity as a downward and centrifugal movement towards the gutters and the margins of the city; a process which, drawing on Benjamin, he discusses in relation to nineteenth-century Paris. In a way, this thesis could be read as an attempt to stretch Didi-Huberman's argument outside the topographical and temporal limits of nineteenth-century Paris, shedding light on the emergence of a similar process of lowering of perspective in the Rome of the second postwar period.

Nevertheless, there are limitations in the history and geography of modernity produced by the historico-materialist approach. For one thing, that approach has mainly focused on the centres of such processes rather than on their peripheries. Common chronologies suggest that modernity is a process which started in the eighteenth century with the Industrial Revolution and culminated in the following century.⁶¹ Following the same logic, modernism is a form of art which slowly emerges in the turmoil generated by modernity and fully develops towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth.⁶² Its recognized centres are Paris, London, Berlin, and later the United States, in particular New York.⁶³

Italy, unlike its Northern European counter parts went through a more troubled and delayed process of modernity.⁶⁴ The way in which Italy has usually been framed within

⁶¹ See Schulte-Sasse, p. 6: '[modernity's] beginnings can be found in the eighteenth century and its culmination in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries'.

⁶² This is the common chronology followed by the canonical studies of modernism. See, for example, Bradbury and McFarlane, 'The Name and Nature of Modernism', p. 52: '[o]ur own concentration in this book is therefore on the period before 1930, even though the lines of demarcation here cannot be clear, for the broader view of Modernism we have offered must suggest an extraordinary range of continuities through into present art'.

⁶³ See Bradbury and McFarlane, 'The Name and Nature of Modernism', p. 36: 'Modernism [...] is commonly viewed from a New York-London-Paris axis'.

⁶⁴ See Robert S. C. Gordon, *Introduction to Twentieth-Century Italian Literature: A Difficult Modernity* (London: Duckworth, 2005). Gordon, as the sub-title of the book makes clear, provides an account of Italian modernity as a complex and problematic process which has marked the country's cultural and literary discourses during the twentieth century: 'As we will see throughout this book, the voices of literary culture, the writers and intellectuals, responded to these and many other transformations with an

discourses of modernity is through the concept of ‘backwardness’, as a consequence of its belated industrialization and its relatively marginal position within European politics. As John Agnew has argued ‘Italy is very much part of the Europe that figures in this historical account of “backwardness”’.⁶⁵ Consequently, Italian modernism is usually framed within chronologies centred on the cases of France, Germany and England, and includes artistic experiences such as Futurism and, in some cases de Chirico’s ‘Metafisica’, or the literary production of authors such as Giuseppe Ungaretti, Italo Svevo and Luigi Pirandello.

I will attempt to challenge this Northern-European-centred map of modernism and modernity, and suggest the need to challenge the linearity of such an account. While it is not my aim to provide a general alternative map of such vast and complex processes, what this thesis attempts to do is to problematize Rome’s specific position within the cartography of modernity. What I aim to show is that Rome constitutes a particularly interesting site of modernity, one which forces us to elaborate a thicker temporality and a wider spatiality of this process, taking into account its returns, its long waves and its survivals. In other words, Rome forces us to acknowledge the anachronisms of modernity, its further ramifications and intersections. For this reason, instead of framing Rome’s modernity through the concept of ‘backwardness’ – a term which re-produces a linear and positivistic model – I would suggest that it can be interpreted through the notion of ‘anachronism’ – a concept which pushes us to look at modernity as a

often bewildering combination of anxiety, resistance and enthusiasm which reflected many of the contradictions and difficulties inherent in the process of modernisation itself” (pp. 8-9).

⁶⁵ See John Agnew, ‘Time Into Space: The Myth of “Backward” Italy in Modern Europe’, *Time & Society*, 5.27 (1996), 27-45 (p. 32). As Agnew argues in his essay, the formation of the myth of Italy’s backward or failed modernity is caused by a very rigid conception of time as based on the dichotomy ‘backward’ and ‘modern’. Two examples of books which have reproduced the myth of Italy’s backward modernity are Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1958) and Carlo Tullio-Altan, *La nostra Italia, arretratezza socioculturale, clientelismo, trasformismo e ribellismo dall’Unità ad oggi* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1986). For a discussion of the myth of Italian backwardness see also Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect: On Making Italians (1860-1920)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 5: ‘The myth of Italian backwardness [...] was and is just that: a myth buttressed by the idea of Italy’s comparatively late industrialization, modernization, and national integration’. For a discussion of Italy’s modernity see also Tim Mason, ‘Italy and Modernization: A Montage’, *History Workshop*, 25-26 (1988), 127-47.

rhizomatic and reticular process. In doing so, we might move from a notion of anachronism as ‘chronological mistake’ or ‘falsification of time’, and accept Didi-Huberman’s claim that ‘la storia non può che essere anacronistica’, in that historical time is characterized by the dialectical interweaving of heterogeneous and multidirectional forces. As Didi-Huberman has written, ‘occorre comprendere che in *ogni oggetto storico tutti i tempi si incontrano, entrano in collisione, si biforcano o si combinano gli uni con gli altri*’.⁶⁶

As we have seen in the previous section, the historical progression of Rome from a compact to a dispersed city provides us with the image of an urban entity characterized by a constant clash of temporalities, rather than that of a city following the one-dimensional model which the notion of backwardness tends to (re)produce. Before 1870 Rome followed a ‘circular’ and ‘eternal’ temporality based on the universal aims of the Catholic Church, which was intent on preserving Rome from the ‘corruption’ of industrialization and modern life. Then, after 1870, the modernizers of the Italian capital attempted to develop an independent model of modernization, alternative to that of Paris and London, and based on the attempt to fuse antiquity with modernity. Rather than following a backward pattern of modernization, Rome’s modernizers were developing a temporal model in which past, present and future intertwined in a complex Gordian knot. In order to overcome the shallows generated by the ‘backward’ model of Roman modernity, what I intend to do is to generate an ‘anachronistic’ temporal model for the

⁶⁶ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Storia dell’arte e anacronismo delle immagini*, trans. by Stefano Chiodi (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007), p. 41: ‘La storia non può che essere anacronistica: significa che per dar conto della “vita storica” – espressione di Burckhardt, tra gli altri – il sapere storico dovrebbe imparare a complessificare i propri modelli di tempo, ad attraversare lo spessore delle memorie multiple, a ritessere le fibre eterogenee del tempo, a ricomporre un andamento dai *ritmi* disgiunti. L’anacronismo riceve da questa complessificazione uno statuto rinnovato, dialettizzato. [...] Parlare così del sapere storico significa dire qualcosa sul suo oggetto, proporre l’ipotesi che *la storia è solo storia di anacronismi*. Voglio dire che, come minimo, l’oggetto cronologico è pensabile solo nel suo controritmico storico’.

study of modern Rome, in which different historical times coexist in the reticulum of the present.⁶⁷

When generating an alternative model we need to take into account the fractures – the paradigm shifts – of Rome’s modern image. In this respect, we might say that the first modern fracture of Rome occurred in 1870, when the city started its journey towards secularization and capitalist development, following a Janus-faced model where the source of modernity was being sought in the city’s classical past. The fascist period violently frustrated this paradigm, emphasizing the idea of purity and superiority embedded within Rome’s classical identity, and attempting to appropriate the city’s development by mingling modernity with its imperial past. The third paradigm shift, which constitutes the focus of this thesis, coincided with the end of the Second World War, which triggered a drastic reconfiguration of Rome’s spatiality and temporality. The collapse of fascism and the end of the war coincided with Italy’s integration within the Western bloc, and with the beginning of a period of reconstruction partially funded by American aid (the ‘Marshall Plan’).⁶⁸ I will analyse this third paradigm shift of Rome’s modernity as a process of detachment between the two poles represented by the double-faced symbol of Janus. As already suggested, from 1945 onwards the image of Rome undergoes a complex process of redefinition in which the pompous patina covering the fascist city seems to collapse like an unsuitable and vulgar layer of make-up; stuccoes, plasters and marbles crumble away, revealing a suffering body covered by wounds and scars. The dramatic nature of this breakdown leads, in a short time, to the redefinition of Rome’s image, which moves from the rhetorical and monumental paradigm of the fascist city to the image of a dusty and popular city.

⁶⁷ Didi-Huberman, *Storia dell’arte*, p. 45.

⁶⁸ For a detailed historical account of Italy’s postwar period and the importance of the ‘Marshall Plan’ see Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 72-120.

The postwar temporal reconfiguration of Rome provoked a process of drastic ‘twisting’ of its imagery. Starting from 1945, Rome’s overlapping pasts, which Freud had famously described in term of a palimpsest only a couple of decades earlier,⁶⁹ ceased to be the paradigm pursued by Rome’s modernizers. From this moment on, Rome entered a phase of modernization in which its classical past and its modern present were seen as disjointed and non-compatible realities. Paraphrasing Herzfeld’s book, we could say that Rome was ‘evicted from eternity’ in the immediate postwar period, when its city centre became a crystal frozen in time, and its modern peripheries spread towards the countryside, far beyond the limits of the ancient city. Rome’s postwar modernization is therefore marked by the sudden mutation of the palimpsest of the ‘Eternal City’ into a vast, contingent and non-homogenous urban and suburban cityscape, inhabited by almost three million people and occupying an urban area ten times bigger than that of 1870.

As we have seen, this process has generated a series of critical discourses which have framed Rome’s loss of its ‘eternal’ aura as a devastating blow, from Insolera’s and Cederna’s denunciations of the corruption and the speculation which accompanied Rome’s postwar modernization, to Herzfeld’s lament for the destruction of Rome’s eternal features. While it is not the aim of this research to assess the social, anthropological or urban implications of this process, I will try to open a crack in the apocalyptic discursive formation which has sprung from these approaches, in order to establish the ground for a re-evaluation of Rome as a cultural site of modernity and modernism. Drawing on Benjamin’s claim that ‘that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art’,⁷⁰ I will interpret Rome’s modernization as a process of loss of the auratic meaning of its classical legacy. In my

⁶⁹ I am referring to Freud’s discussion of Rome’s urban structure as palimpsest in Sigmund Freud, ‘Civilization and Its Discontents’, in *The Standard Edition of the Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans by James Strachey and others, 24 vols (London: Hogarth, 1953-1974), XXI, pp. 59-147.

⁷⁰ Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art’, p. 221.

reading, Rome's eviction from eternity is paired with the loss of that auratic force, which according to Benjamin leads to 'a tremendous shattering of tradition' and to the 'liquidation of the traditional value of cultural heritage'.⁷¹ However, rather than reading Rome's loss of aura and eternity in a negative or apocalyptic way, I propose to interpret it as a dialectical process. In this respect, my reading of Benjamin's thesis on the vanishing of the aura is in line with his belief that 'every negation has its value solely as background for the delineation of the lively, the positive'.⁷² If we apply this idea to the case of Rome, we will be able not only to recognize the degenerative effects provoked by the city's modern shift, but also to distinguish its productive and positive side-effects.

iv. The Formation of a New Discursive Field on Rome's Modernity

To synthesize what I have said about the main objectives of my research so far: the aim of this thesis is to open a breach in the discursive formation of Rome's modernity as a process of decay and degeneration. Instead of seeing Rome's eviction from eternity as a negative process, I propose to accept it as a dialectic process characterized by corruption, speculation and mistakes but also by a series of engagements with modernist aesthetics, cultural responses and thought processes. In this respect, my work follows Vidotto's call for a revision of the framework through which Rome's modernity has traditionally been interpreted. As he argues, '[l]a lettura della città contemporanea, di tutta la sua storia dal 1870 in poi, nella chiave negativa della speculazione, dunque utilizzando un criterio monocausale, si irrigidisce presto in una vulgata immodificabile'.⁷³ For Vidotto, Rome's modern growth was undoubtedly a troubled and somehow traumatic process, characterized by a series of negative consequences, but it also

⁷¹ See Benjamin, 'The Work of Art', p. 221.

⁷² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 459.

⁷³ Vidotto, p. 289.

triggered the rise of an extremely interesting and open model of modernity.⁷⁴ As he comments: ‘È una modernizzazione specifica di Roma che molti intellettuali, pur essendovi largamente immersi, non sembrano in grado di cogliere se non per rifiutarne gli esiti, infastiditi per gli scostamenti dai modelli di cultura alta e per i ricorrenti sconfinamenti delle nuove mode, sociologiche e/o psicologiche’.⁷⁵ Thus, instead of looking at Rome’s modernity as a monolithic process characterized solely by the destruction of the urban and cultural fabric of the ‘Eternal City’, Vidotto emphasizes the capillarity of such a complex process, which materializes not only in its huge bureaucratic apparatus, but also in the cultural capital represented by the city’s numerous universities, research institutes, and international academies and archives, as well as in its role as an international hub for modern media productions such as radio, cinema and television.⁷⁶

Vidotto’s seminal work could be considered a watershed for the construction of a more open paradigm of interpretation of Rome’s modernity, in that it symptomatically preceded the flourishing of studies focusing on specific aspects of this process from very different perspectives and within various areas of study. These areas range from architecture and urban studies to memory studies, film studies and cultural studies. Clear examples of this new trend are the six volumes on Rome’s suburbs released by the publishing house Franco Angeli between 2006 and 2009, which analyse the modern history of Rome’s suburban periphery through the perspective of oral history.⁷⁷ As

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 323.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ See Vidotto, pp. 322-25.

⁷⁷ These studies are Monica Sinatra, *La Garbatella a Roma 1920-1940* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2006); Bruno Bonomo, *Il quartiere delle valli, costruire Roma nel secondo dopoguerra* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007); Emiliana Camarda, *Pietralata: da campagna a isola di periferia* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007); Stefania Ficacci, *Tor Pignattara: fascismo e Resistenza di un quartiere romano* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007); Ulrike Viccaro, *Storia di Borgata Gordiani: dal fascismo agli anni del ‘boom’* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007); Eva Masini, *Piazza Bologna: alle origini di un quartiere ‘borghese’* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2009). To these six studies published by Franco Angeli one could add Alessandro Portelli, Bruno Bonomo, Alice Sotgia and Ulrike Viccaro (eds), *Città di parole: storia orale di una periferia romana* (Rome: Donzelli, 2006).

Filippo De Pieri has noted, these six works are extremely helpful in that, by shedding new light on the forgotten memories of Rome's peripheries, they help us to gain a better understanding of Rome's suburban growth.⁷⁸

Within the field of architecture studies, we could also cite Anna Paola Briganti and Alessandro Mazza's edited book on Rome's twentieth-century architecture, which frames Rome as a site of production of an alternative (rather than backward) modernist style.⁷⁹ Though inscribed within a very different area of research from that which informs this thesis, Briganti and Mazza's volume constitutes an important point of comparison for my work, in that they share the attempt to overturn an idea of Rome's modernity as backward. As Marcello Fagiolo writes in the book's introduction, Rome's architectural modernism expresses 'una modernità dispiegata come processo di ritorno e non freccia rettilinea'.⁸⁰ Among the many interesting articles collected in this book, Mazza's essay seems particularly relevant to the argument developed here in that it asks us to think about the complexity and the reticular movement of Rome's modernity. As he writes, Rome's modernist architecture offers us 'un'immagine plurale, articolata e spesso sorprendente del secolo indagato', and thus 'restituisce un tracciato della modernità aperto a nuove suggestioni, a una rete di percorsi polidirezionale'.⁸¹

At the crossroads between film, urban and cultural studies, Karen Pinkus's *The Montesi Scandal*⁸² and John David Rhodes's *Stupendous Miserable City*⁸³ represent two key texts for the understanding of specific turning moments in Rome's modernity, and constitute two very important points of reference for this thesis. In a way, these two

⁷⁸ See Filippo De Pieri, 'Searching for Memories in the Suburbs of Rome', *Modern Italy*, 15.3 (2010), 371-79.

⁷⁹ Anna Paola Briganti and Alessandro Mazza (eds), *Roma: architetture, biografie: 1870-1970* (Rome: Prospettive, 2010).

⁸⁰ Marcello Fagiolo, 'Roma capitale: per un atlante delle architetture', in *Roma: architetture, biografie: 1870-1970*, ed. by Briganti and Mazza, pp. 11-15 (p. 11).

⁸¹ Alessandro Mazza, 'La modernità dissipata', in *Roma*, ed. by Briganti and Mazza, pp. 26-54 (p. 36).

⁸² Karen Pinkus, *The Montesi Scandal: The Death of Wilma Montesi and the Birth of the Papparazzi in Fellini's Rome* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003).

⁸³ John David Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City: Pasolini's Rome* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2007).

books could be read as a diptych of a single study on modern Rome's two most iconic representations: Fellini's depiction of the alienated glamour of via Veneto (Pinkus) and Pasolini's contradictory portrayal of the 'borgate' (Rhodes). In Pinkus's book Rome emerges as the centre for the production of both a modernist aesthetics and a glamorously modern lifestyle, which accompany the city's movement into modernity. However, rather than highlighting the degenerative effects of Rome's shift into a society of spectacle,⁸⁴ Pinkus underlines its intrinsic relationship with Fellini's cinematic style, based on notions of juxtaposition and montage stemming from the hyper-fragmented and fast expanding cityscape of a modernizing Rome. In a similar way, Rhodes's book on Pasolini crucially highlights the bond between Rome's postwar peripheral expansion and Pasolini's cinematic style. As he writes 'Pasolini's Roman films are among the most significant and compelling aesthetic responses to and documents of the Roman periphery as it existed in the 1960s'.⁸⁵ For Rhodes, Pasolini's porous, disjointed and paratactic aesthetic, which materializes in *Accattone's* long travelling shots, in the syncretism of his poetry, and in the accumulation of narrative fragments which characterizes his novels, are examples of a peculiar modernist style stemming from Rome's modernizing cityscape.

These works are just some of the most important examples of recent research on Rome which open up the semantic meaning of the signifier 'Rome' within the discursive field of modernity.⁸⁶ In spite of the differences between the areas of research in which these studies have emerged, what links them together is an open and osmotic conception of Rome's modernity, in which the discontents generated by the complex

⁸⁴ Here I am referring to Guy Debord, *The Society of Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995).

⁸⁵ Rhodes, p. x.

⁸⁶ Other volumes which are characterized by the attempt to open up the possibilities to read contemporary Rome are, among others, Dorigen Caldwell and Lesley Caldwell (eds), *Rome, Continuing Encounters Between Past and Present* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011); Cristina Mazzoni (ed.), 'Capital City: Rome 1870-2010', the themed issue of *Annali d'italianistica*, 28 (2010); Dom Holdaway and Filippo Trentin (eds), *Rome, Postmodern Narratives of a Cityscape* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013).

process of the city's modernization do not deny the possibility of interpreting it also as a particularly interesting process in terms of culture and aesthetics.

v. Thesis Outline and Methodology: An Archaeology of Rome's Modernity

What this thesis shares with the works mentioned above is the same open approach towards Rome's modernity, and a dissatisfaction with the binarism proposed by those studies which have frozen the city's image through rigid epistemological categories such as the 'Eternal City' versus 'Modern Hell'. In this respect, I aim to move from a rigidly dichotomic to a bipolar and dialectical understanding of Rome's modernity. In order to challenge the shortcomings produced by a binary approach to the city's modern growth, I aim to read Rome as a site which has generated an alternative, open and articulated idea of modernity.

While my work is located within the same discursive field as the recent studies on Rome's modernity mentioned above, unlike Rhodes's and Pinkus's books it does not focus on an individual author. Instead, I will analyse a series of heterogeneous texts, ranging from novels to films, from journal articles to histories and urban histories of Rome. My hope is that what I risk losing in terms of verticality and depth of analysis, I will gain in terms of horizontality and understanding of historical shifts. At the same time though, while I focus on a specific historical period which stretches from the end of the Second World War to the early 1970s, I do not emulate Vidotto's attempt to approach history as an evolutionary process, based on a succession of political and social events. Instead of working with a single case study in order to analyse and dissect it in its full detail, or instead of adopting a causal approach based on a search for origins, sources and affiliations, I will seek to detect and organize my object of study

into different series, ‘which are juxtaposed to one another, follow one another, overlap and intersect, without one being able to reduce them to a linear schema’.⁸⁷

I read my primary texts through the lens of Foucault’s archaeology, through which artistic products such as novels, short stories, poems or films cease to be understood as individual products of an inspired ‘Author’, and are rather read as markers (what Giorgio Agamben defines a ‘signature’) of historicity. As Agamben writes (commenting on Foucault’s archaeology):

L’oggetto storico non è [...] mai dato in modo neutrale, ma è sempre accompagnato da un indice o da una segnatura, che lo costituisce come immagine e ne determina e condiziona temporalmente la leggibilità. Lo storico non sceglie a caso o in modo arbitrario i suoi documenti dalla massa sterminata e inerte dell’archivio: egli segue il filo sottile e inapparente delle segnature.⁸⁸

Following Foucault’s and Agamben’s insights, this thesis follows the visual and textual traces generated by Rome’s modern growth with the aim of providing a morphological interpretation of the city’s modernity through the mutations of its imagery.

In other words, my research is not a history of Rome’s literary or cinematic representations, nor is it a cultural history of Rome’s modernity. Notwithstanding the fact that literary and filmic texts form the main focus of my research, I do not propose to analyse them in a strictly philological way, attempting to detect their affiliation or their belonging to specific traditions. Rather, I trace a figural morphology of Rome’s historical mutation between the 1940s and the 1970s – a period in which the city opened itself up to historical forces which have since produced a dispersive, multifarious and polymorphous series of images and discourses. In this regard, this investigation attempts to ‘measure the mutations that operate in general in the field of history’,⁸⁹ in order to detect the discursive relationships that these texts, which were produced at the

⁸⁷ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 10.

⁸⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Signatura rerum: sul metodo* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008), p. 74.

⁸⁹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 17.

same time within the same cultural environment, establish among themselves. In this regard, this thesis could be understood as an archaeological deconstruction of the signifier ‘Rome’ which attempts to detect the onset points of its modern image during the three decades which have followed the end of the Second World War,⁹⁰ with the aim of discovering ‘a plastic continuity, the movement of a meaning that is embodied in various representations, images, and metaphors’.⁹¹

I have integrated the archaeological analysis of this core group of texts with a more detailed formal and aesthetical analysis of two key novels – Carlo Levi’s *L’orologio* and Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Petrolio* – and a film – Federico Fellini’s *La dolce vita* – which, I suggest, allow us to follow the emergence of a modernist aesthetics stemming from Rome’s fast modernizing cityscape during this period. What I argue here is that, in spite of their different genealogies, aims and objects of representation, these three texts share the same attempt to decompose linear narratives through the accumulation of fragments, and that this (modernist) technique of composition is embedded in their attempts to incorporate, absorb and represent Rome’s multifarious, fractured and non-homogenous modernizing cityscape. What *L’orologio*, *La dolce vita* and *Petrolio* have in common is the rejection of traditional forms of mimetic representations, and the deconstruction of ‘objective’ or total narratives through the development of a hyper-fragmentary and partial perspective on reality. What I suggest is not that these three artistic works were conceived in relationship to each other, but rather that by following the progressive crumbling away and fragmentation of their aesthetic structure we are

⁹⁰ See Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 7-8: ‘history, in its traditional form, undertook to memorize the monuments of the past, transform them into documents [...]; in our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments. In that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, *it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities*. There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past, aspired to the condition of history, and attained meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse; it might be said, to play on words a little, that *in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology*, to the intrinsic description of the monument’ [my emphasis].

⁹¹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 168.

able to glimpse the process of dilation of Rome's urban form between the 1940s and the 1970s.

From a methodological point of view, the first problem that my work needs to address is the relationship between the texts analysed and the different historical moments in which they were produced. What sort of traces are left in these texts of the unravelling of historical processes such as the end of the war, the collapse of fascism, the drastic transformations triggered by the 'economic miracle', the protest movements of 1968, the beginning of a period of crisis and retreat characterized by terrorism and the energy crisis, and so on? In what respect have these historical events influenced and marked the formation of Rome's imagery throughout this period? Or, moving from Rome as a place of representation to Rome as a cultural centre, how did Roman intellectual circles react and engage with such historical changes?

I seek to answer these questions by carefully examining various texts stemming from Roman intellectual circles and also representing Rome in the period taken into account. In developing my archaeological reading of these texts, I began to note the emergence of different 'discursive formations' characterizing the way in which Rome was imagined and represented. Traces of those formations can be found in the three macro-sections which define the architecture of the thesis, which are organized around the notions of 'fleetingness' (in the immediate postwar period), 'dilation' (1950s and early 1960s), and 'entropy' (late 1960s and early 1970s). I interpret these three concepts as signatures/markers, which allow us to grasp the fractures affecting Rome's modern image from the 1940s to the 1970s. In this regard, 'fleetingness', 'dilation' and 'entropy' represent three bi-polar discursive formations which challenge the dichotomic vision of Rome's modernity as based on the concepts of 'Eternal City' versus 'Concrete Hell'.

Each macro-section is then composed of individual chapters which investigate a specific group of texts which I consider paradigmatic for the articulation of the three discursive formations which structure the thesis. The argument at the core of the first chapter is that in the immediate postliberation period Rome emerges as an important intellectual centre for the definition of a new modernist aesthetic which was based on the incorporation of marginal, ephemeral and peripheral elements and which triggered the formation of an image opposed to the magniloquence of the fascist city. In order to develop this argument, in the first part of the chapter I analyse a series of literary and cultural journals published in Rome in the immediate postwar period. More specifically, through a critical reading of periodicals such as *La fiera letteraria*, *Rinascita*, *Il presente* and *La strada*, I attempt to understand in what way the shift from fascism to democracy influenced the discourse about the role of the intellectual and the artist in the postwar period. Then, in the second part of this chapter I move from a critical reading of the debates published in these journals to the analysis of a series of narrative and poetic texts set in postwar Rome – from Alberto Moravia's *Racconti romani* to Elio Filippo Accrocca's poetry collection *Portonaccio*, from Anna Maria Ortese's Roman stories collected in *La lente scura* to Carlo Levi's *Roma fuggitiva*. In spite of their enormous differences – not only between literary texts and journal articles, but also between different literary texts, or between different articles – what these texts share is a similar top-down perspective on reality. While during fascism artistic debates were characterized by concepts of purity and abstraction ('prosa d'arte', hermeticism, etc.) and the writer consequently tended to look at reality from a high culture perspective (the myth of the Ivory Tower), the intellectual debates of the postwar period are engaged in the theorization of a necessary horizontal shift of the artistic gaze, which is now moving towards the low, the street, the particular, the degraded – all those elements of reality that fascism attempted to suppress.

The second chapter develops a close reading of Carlo Levi's *L'orologio*. What it argues is that Levi's novel represents a key text through which to recognize the top-down movement of the writer's gaze theorized by the elite periodicals of the time, and that it perfectly captures the fleeting and transient atmosphere characterizing Rome's imagery at the end of the war. In my reading, by depicting postwar Rome as a field of tensions where different temporalities cohabit and clash against each other (the heritage of fascism, the trauma of the war, the legacy of the resistance, the beginning of the reconstruction, the debates on the ideological foundations of the Italian democracy), *L'orologio* emerges as a paradigmatic text for understanding Rome's shift from fascism to democracy. Levi's novel not only epitomizes Rome's fleeting and multifarious image at this moment in time, but it also seems able to incorporate the city's ephemeral atmosphere in the aesthetic structure of its narrative. The city's fragmented, polymorphous and quickly mutating cityscape is absorbed within the novel's fluid, deconstructed and fractured narrative structure, which I propose to read in relationship with Gilles Deleuze's notion of the time-image.⁹²

The second macro-section of the thesis frames 1950s Rome as an 'expanding city'. In order to understand better this process of dilation, the first chapter of this section focuses on the development of a 'Roman' discourse on modernity, which, I argue, takes a particularly interesting shape in the pages of the journal *Nuovi argomenti* during the 1950s. The birth of *Nuovi argomenti*, initially edited by Alberto Moravia and Alberto Carocci, coincided with the formation and the cultural hegemony of the Roman intelligentsia. I begin my discussion on Rome's 1950s by looking at the ways in which the discourse on modernity and, in particular, the problematic relationship between the Italy's pre-modern past and its modern present developed in the pages of this 'Roman' journal.

⁹² Here I am referring to Deleuze's discussion of the time-image in *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*.

The second and the third chapters of this section discuss, respectively, Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* and Pier Paolo Pasolini's early Roman works, seen as crucial case studies for the understanding of Rome's modern dilation. In my reading, Fellini and Pasolini engage in very different yet complementary ways with the urban body of the modernizing Rome, allowing us to visualize a vast archive of images which open up new ways of looking at the city, while at the same time deconstructing Rome's traditional image. Such complementary differences materialize in the two artists' ways of moving around Rome's dilating urbanscape. While in *La dolce vita* Fellini's gaze is attracted by different bodies, areas and forms of Rome's expanding urban surface, and keeps wandering without a clear direction (Marcello is the paradigmatic observer of Fellini's modernized Rome), Pasolini chooses to redesign the topography of Rome by reversing the hierarchies of its map from the centre to the periphery and comparing the spatiality of exclusion characterizing the 'borgata' to that of the concentration camp. In this respect, Fellini and Pasolini drastically open up the semantic meaning of the signifier Rome multiplying its images and producing two crucial paradigms of Rome's modernity. What I will argue is that both Fellini's glamorous and alienated *via Veneto* and Pasolini's stupendous and miserable borgata condense in their contradictions the dilating trajectory of Rome's modernity. At the same time, I propose to interpret Fellini's *La dolce vita* and Pasolini's Roman short stories and novels through an investigation of their technique of composition. In the development of this analysis I will particularly focus on the possibility of interpreting their work as a paradigmatic example of a 'Roman' high-modernist artistic style, based on the breaking up of causal and linear patterns of narration.

The third section of the thesis interprets late 1960s and early 1970s Rome in terms of crisis and the shrinking of horizons. My argument concentrates on the emergence of an 'entropic' discursive formation, stemming from Rome's cityscape during this time. In

order to investigate the entropic shift of Rome's image, the sixth chapter analyses a series of texts which go from Pasolini's poem 'IL PCI AI GIOVANI!!' to the articles by various authors collected in the volume *Contro Roma*, from Mario Praz's *Panopticon romano* to Eugenio Ragni's *Roma nella letteratura italiana contemporanea*. In my reading, all these texts, which were produced at the peak of Rome's modern development, are marked by a similar sense of loss, generated by the advance of modernity. This sense of loss materializes in a feeling of melancholic lament for the disappearance of Rome's pre-modern features and, consequently, in an attitude of complete rejection for the city's modernity, which reaches its apogee in Moravia's statement that 'Roma oggi appare come una slabbrata e sgangherata cittadina mediterranea, sede di uno Stato che non è uno Stato, capitale di una nazione che non è una nazione'.⁹³

Finally, the seventh and final chapter of the thesis analyses Pasolini's *Petrolio* as a text which paradigmatically represents Rome's entropic shift. However, what I argue is that, in spite of its apocalyptic tone, *Petrolio* remains an incredibly interesting text in that it records the complexity of Rome's contemporary image and never fails to engage with the city's shattered body. The intricacies, the entanglements and the deranged and incoherent urban surface of modernized Rome become architectural elements of *Petrolio*'s narrative, materializing in its anti-linear structure, characterized by the chaotic accumulation of textual fragments. In this respect, what this chapter argues is that Pasolini's last novel opens up new possibilities of reading Rome, allowing us to glimpse a series of images, visions and flashes which capture the city's shift from modernity to postmodernity.

⁹³ Moravia, 'Introduzione: Delusione di Roma', p. 14.

Section I. The Fleeting City

The last sequence of Rossellini's film *Roma, città aperta* (1945) captures a group of young boys whistling in front of a fence at the top of Monte Mario.¹ They are witnessing the execution of Don Pietro, the priest who had helped the fighters of the Resistance during the hardest times of Rome's occupation. His face looks absorbed in deep thought during the dramatic instants that precede his death. However, when he suddenly recognizes the whistling of the boys from his parish, his expression changes, in an impulse of faith, with almost a hint of a smile (fig. 1.1).



Figs. 1.1-1.2: Don Pietro's execution and the boys' descent towards Rome's streets in Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta*

Precisely at that moment, a platoon composed of Italian soldiers voluntarily misses their target, creating a sense of suspension during which the boys stop whistling. A few seconds later, a Nazi official kills the priest with a gunshot, breaking the suspense. After that tragic moment, a sense of shock is condensed in the boys' eyes. The shock is caused by the trauma of Don Pietro's execution, which represented the culmination of a long series of tragedies the boys had already witnessed during the endless wartime years. Then, they turn their backs on the execution's scene and, from the top of the hill, they descend towards the streets of Rome (fig. 1.2). The last snapshot we see, while the

¹ *Roma, città aperta*, dir. by Roberto Rossellini (Excelsa Film, 1945).

film credits are still rolling, is a wide shot of Rome's cityscape, with its distinctive skyline made up of old roofs and the unmistakable silhouette of Saint Peter's Dome.

This section investigates the way in which writers and intellectuals perceived and represented Rome's transition from fascism to democracy in the postwar period. My point of departure is the idea that this historical change also triggered a change of aesthetic perspective, from the heights of hermeticism to the depths of a new aesthetic of the low and of the marginal.² In my argument, this downward movement metaphorically corresponds to the last scene of *Roma città aperta*, in which the young boys descend from the hill overlooking the city to the bottom of Rome's narrow streets. In other terms, this section metaphorically attempts to frame the destiny of those boys, as if the lens of the camera had intended to follow them beyond the end of Rossellini's film. In a supposed continuation of that scene, we would have seen the boys walking down from Monte Mario and merging into the crowd. In order to keep following their movements, the camera would have had to employ two tracking shots: a first one looking downward, from the top of the hill to the bottom of Rome's streets, and a second one pointing inwards, in order to capture their specific place within the crowd.³ What I argue is that this (supposed) downward movement of the camera lens also corresponds, metaphorically, to a new paradigm – low, flattened, detailed – of the postwar artist's perspective on reality, and that this shift is intrinsically bound to a new image of Rome emerging from the debris of the war and the collapse of fascism.

² Though I am aware of the importance of neorealism precisely for the redefinition of a new aesthetic in the postwar period, in order to highlight the complexity and ambiguity of this term and to propose a departure from its univocal use, in this chapter I prefer to use the expression *aesthetic of the marginal*. I will further justify this choice later on in the first chapter.

³ This is a change of perspective that has emerged with the advance of urban modernity, as captured by Edgar Allan Poe's story 'The Man of the Crowd', in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by Charles F. Richardson, 10 vols (New York: Cosimo, 2009), IV, pp. 159-73. In this story, the narrator operates an inward movement, from an external to an internal perception of the crowd: 'At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance' (p. 161). For an analysis of this shift in relation to the emergence of capitalist modernity see Carlo Ginzburg, 'Spie. Radici di un paradigma indiziario', in *Miti emblematici spie: morfologia e storia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), pp. 158-209.

In this imaginary sequel, the closure of Rossellini's film would have moved from the general – the attempt to capture the whole of the city through a long shot – to the particular. Similarly to Michel de Certeau's Icarus, this imaginary lens would have moved from a voyeuristic view from above to the 'endless labyrinths far below',⁴ shifting its perspective from that of a 'voyeur-god' to that of the 'ordinary practitioners of the city' or, more simply, of the walker.⁵ If, in de Certeau's *The Practices of Everyday Life*, Icarus falls from the top of the World Trade Centre to the nervousness of New York's traffic, in Rome Icarus's fall would have followed the trajectory of the postwar city, from the roof of a pompous fascist building such as, for example, the Palace of the Italian Civilization, to the fervid squalor of the city's hyper-populated peripheries.

In order to follow this paradigmatic shift this section focuses on the way in which writers and intellectuals operating in Rome in the immediate postwar period perceived, debated and represented Rome's cultural and aesthetic changes during the years of the reconstruction. What I will try to demonstrate is that, as a consequence of this downward movement, a previously submerged reality composed of fossils, detritus and sediments coming from the hidden or suppressed layers of the city suddenly came to the surface, determining a reconfiguration of the way in which Rome was seen and represented. In the postwar city, entire social classes and urban areas which had been marginalised during the fascist regime re-acquired an unexpected centrality: tramps, prostitutes, penniless artists, as well as the dusty and miserable areas in which they lived, became crucial focal points of postwar Rome.

In the first chapter I will focus on the cultural debates which developed in Roman journals of the postwar period such as *La fiera letteraria*, *Rinascita*, or *La strada*,

⁴ See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 92.

⁵ See de Certeau, in particular the chapter 'Walking in the City', pp. 91-110.

before moving to a close reading of the writings on Rome of Elio Filippo Accrocca, Anna Maria Ortese, Alberto Moravia, and Carlo Levi's *Roma fuggitiva* (2002). In the second chapter I develop a close reading of Levi's *L'orologio* (1950). What I argue is that this novel represents an important case study for the emergence of the postwar image of Rome. In the book, the blurred contour of postwar Rome seemed to find a more precise physiognomy, while at the same time the writer was operating a re-inscription of those elements formerly erased by fascism. Levi's Rome emerges then as a complex space in which different images coming from different eras cohabit and intersect: from the phlegmatic and bureaucratic Rome of the ministries to the fervid and passionate city of small editorial offices and printing houses; from the fascinating ancient streets and buildings of the historical centre to the corrupt world of politicians. It is specifically thanks to his capacity to capture this fleeting and ephemeral atmosphere that Levi's Rome appears to register symptomatically the change of paradigm that is taking place in the image of Rome, from the rigid and stiff city of fascism to the vibrant and fleeting entity of the postwar period.

1. The Marginal and the Refuse: Lowering of Gazes in Postwar Rome

Il simbolo di questa città non è un museo bensì una piazza, una piazza qualunque, con in basso le tende e i banchetti, il lezzo del pesce e i rifiuti del mercato, e con in alto, al di sopra delle tende, la figura di Giordano Bruno che fa ombra alle stelle.
Ladislao Szabo

1.1. The Streets of Rome: Towards a Fleeting Topography

In the cultural geography of postwar Italy, Rome's intellectual circles occupied an interlocutory position. They represented a sort of compromise between the conservatism of Florence – influenced by the intellectual legacy of two great masters, Eugenio Montale and Carlo Emilio Gadda – and the technical avant-gardism of Turin and Milan, as expressed by Elio Vittorini's *Politecnico*, advocating a strong break with the culture of the *ventennio*. While the Florentine group was defending the activity of *sprovincializzazione* of Italian culture exercised by *Solaria* during the 1920s and '30s, Northern-based intellectuals such as Vittorini and Francesco Flora were claiming for Milan the role of spiritual guide of the country, after it had become the centre of coordination for the Resistance against Nazi-Fascism during the last two years of the war. Unlike Florence, Rome could not claim such a highbrow prestigious experience as that of *Solaria*, nor could it advocate the role of anti-fascist spiritual guide claimed by Milan.¹ Nevertheless, it was a place of animated cultural debate, as demonstrated by the

¹ For an introduction to the cultural environment of postwar Rome see Nicola Merola, 'La cultura romana del dopoguerra', *Studi romani*, 25.3 (1977), 387-97. In an important passage of the article, the author talks about the *linea romana* as 'non concepita come cittadella arroccata in un suo orgoglio egemonico, esclusivo, ma intesa in accezione aperta e problematica, e quindi una scuola priva di santuari, refrattaria a liturgie trionfalistiche, senza maestri carismatici [...] dopo le livide stagioni della tragedia dell'Europa una cultura in movimento, inquieta delle attese e dei problemi del nuovo ciclo storico che faticosamente si va snodando per l'uomo d'occidente' (p. 388). Merola's description of the move from the 'cittadella arroccata' (of the fascist period) to a more open and animated situation (in the postwar period) symptomatically reveals the markers of a top-down movement.

great number of journals and newspapers published in the city.² The pages of periodicals such as *Il presente*, *La strada*, *Rinascita* or *La fiera letteraria* were indeed filled with lively discussion on the state of contemporary art and society.

Rome itself was covered – perhaps even more than Milan and Florence – by signs, traces and scars left by the war bombings and by twenty years of fascist dictatorship. Not only had the architects of the regime drastically revisited its urban structure, but also Roman citizens themselves had directly witnessed Mussolini's attempt to promote a rebirth of the myth of the Imperial city. To achieve that aim, many public spaces of the city had been rebuilt, becoming symbolic places for the fascist modernization of the city.³

The falsification of tradition operated by fascism, and its attempt to aestheticize politics, had been accompanied in literature by a new language, that of hermeticism. This literary style, theorized by Francesco Flora and Carlo Bo in the mid-1930s, advocated a language refined of impurities and detached from a direct representation of reality.⁴ During the immediate postwar period, the battle for a new culture to oppose that of fascism was also embodied in debates on hermeticism, in particular whether or not it should be considered a literary language embedded within fascist culture. The fact that some of the most important Italian poets of the time, such as Giuseppe Ungaretti, Eugenio Montale and Salvatore Quasimodo, were considered hermeticist poets did not help, and the discussion became a sort of trial of the credibility of Italian culture itself.

² See Merola, p. 394: 'il numero delle riviste che si pubblicarono a Roma nel periodo immediatamente successivo alla fine della guerra e fino al 1950 sfiora almeno la quarantina, un livello particolarmente elevato e tanto più se si considerano le difficoltà oggettive particolarmente nei primi tempi'.

³ For a classical study on the urban politics of fascism see Antonio Cederna, *Mussolini urbanista: lo sventramento di Roma negli anni del consenso* (Bari: Laterza, 1979). For a study of fascism through the framework of modernity see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁴ The term 'hermeticism' refers to the legendary figure of Hermes Trismegistus (III A.D.), considered the author of the *Hermetic Corpus*, a mystic text of divination of the Hellenistic period. The critic Francesco Flora maintained that the difficulty and abstractness of his style had close analogies with the poetic trend of 1930s Italy. See Francesco Flora, *La poesia ermetica* (Bari: Laterza, 1936), and Carlo Bo, *Letteratura come vita* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1994), pp. 3-16 (first published in *Frontespizio* in 1938).

In *Il presente*,⁵ a poetry journal published in Rome during the 1950s, the scholar Mario Petrucciani stated the need for a serious analysis of hermeticism, capable of discerning between those elements which had to be erased and others which should be kept, thus establishing a new, more democratic way to look at and represent reality. For him:

Il problema della poesia italiana, oggi, s'incentra nell'interpretazione 'attiva' di tutto il primo novecento e, in particolare, del cosiddetto ermetismo, e nella ricerca di un *ubi consistam*, vale a dire di una consistenza che potremmo definire l'originale sintesi lirica in cui l'uomo si realizzi con tutta l'urgenza delle sue odierne istanze etico-esistenziali, prima che 'letterarie' [...]. Abbiamo condannato come degenerazione solipsistica tutto quell'atteggiamento espressivo astruso e 'prezioso', intellettualisticamente artefatto, nel quale la parola stessa viene svuotata d'ogni realtà di vita e di dolore, per essere proiettata nel meccanismo di un 'gioco' puramente arbitrario e perciò carico di falsificazioni.⁶

Although Petrucciani's argument focused explicitly on poetry, we could interpret it more broadly as a discussion of the role of the writer immediately after the end of the war and following twenty years of fascism. He is trying to answer the question 'which perspective does the author (or, we could add, the filmmaker, or painter) have to assume in order to look at reality'? Fascist censorship had forced writers to abandon references to specific facts or events that offered a negative image of the Italian situation, pushing them to adopt a highly controlled language, full of vague allusions.⁷ As a reaction, postwar intellectuals such as Petrucciani considered the hermeticist way of looking at reality as a solipsistic degeneration, based on a very abstract and hyper-intellectualistic attitude which eventually led to the falsification of reality. Nonetheless, rather than promoting a definite break with the past, Petrucciani sought to create some sort of continuity between the few 'authentic' voices of the previous period, such as that of

⁵ The journal *Il presente, poesia e critica* was published in Rome between 1952 and 1958. It was directed by Mario Petrucciani, Romano Romani, Mario Vitti, Cesare Cochetti and Ornella Sobrero.

⁶ Mario Petrucciani, 'Premesse di una ricerca', *Il presente, poesia e critica*, 4-5 (1952), 1-3 (p. 3).

⁷ See Guido Bonsaver, *Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

Ungaretti, and the authors who were emerging in the postwar years. Important features for the construction of the new aesthetic had to be essentiality, clarity and concreteness.

Petrucciani's article represented a sort of final statement on a discourse – that based on the necessity of a link between past and present cultural experiences – that filled the pages of many other Roman journals in the immediate postwar period. Another important review journal at the time, *La fiera letteraria*, also participated in this debate.⁸ In its first issue after the end of the war, the journal's editor Gian Battista Angioletti established the editorial board's position by commenting on the need to create a bridge between past and present literary experiences in order to produce a new and more democratic language:

Il lettore [...] si rassicurerà vedendo con quanto rispetto e quanta frequenza ci occuperemo dell'opera del passato, e come anzi proprio dal passato, dalla capacità di intendere il passato, gli scrittori e gli artisti d'oggi traggano la convinzione di una continuità non interrompibile.⁹

By 'reassuring' readers about the importance of the past and of tradition, not only does Angioletti suggest the need to create a sense of continuity between pre-war literary experiences and postwar ones, he also negates the possibility of weighing up critically the artistic production of the *ventennio*. For him, Italian writers and artists had to 'riprendere il loro posto senza esitazioni e senza superflue crisi di coscienza' because 'l'arte non poteva essere diversa da quella che fu negli ultimi decenni'.¹⁰ With these conservative statements, issued in the immediate aftermath of the war, Angioletti was basically attempting to provide writers and critics with an alibi which allowed them not to question the aesthetic (and therefore moral) precepts of hermeticist art.

⁸ *La fiera letteraria* was first published in Milan in 1925, before moving to Rome in 1928 under the direction of Giovanni Battista Angioletti and Curzio Malaparte. Publication ceased between 1936 and 1946, when it began again to circulate with an editorial board composed of the same Angioletti, who was also the editor, Corrado Alvaro, Giuseppe Contini, Emilio Cecchi and Giuseppe Ungaretti.

⁹ Gian Battista Angioletti, 'Dal fanatismo alla libertà', *La fiera letteraria*, 1.1 (1946), 1 (p. 1).

¹⁰ Angioletti, p. 1.

One year earlier, in March 1945, the artist Mario Mafai had intervened in the same debate from the columns of the communist journal *Rinascita*:¹¹

Oggi si sente il bisogno di inventare, di liquidare in qualche modo il passato, ma è difficile aspettarsi fracasso, come di statua crollata. La vecchia cultura si sgretola giorno per giorno, cade pezzo per pezzo, si sveste di quegli apparati superficiali, delle verniciature demagogiche. [...] Un'arte si è affermata e si è sviluppata negli ultimi venticinque anni. Oggi viene condannata. Arte per arte, torre d'avorio, egoismo, decadenza in una parola. E sia. Io vorrei distinguere tra due posizioni: in generale quando una società è arrivata ad un suo punto di saturazione l'arte prende due forme, una rappresentativa di quella determinata società, ne assorbe i succhi vitali, ne illustra e ne esalta i caratteri più spiccati, e un'altra che ne avverte le prime deficienze.¹²

In this article Mafai raised similar problems to those noted by Petrucciani and Angioletti. However, the position of the Roman artist appears slightly different from that of the director of *La fiera letteraria*. The conservatism of the latter's judgment, rejecting any possibility of criticizing openly the art of the *ventennio*, is counteracted by Mafai via a more progressive attitude. Unlike Angioletti, Mafai aims to go beyond a simplistic reading of the debate as a quarrel between hermeticists and anti-hermeticists, proposing instead a more complex view of the artistic production of the fascist period. In order to do so he compares it with the art of the Renaissance, a time in which both Raphael – 'il più alto rappresentante di quella società' – and Michelangelo – 'che agita i corpi e annunzia un nuovo dramma che sarà poi la Controriforma' – were active.¹³ According to Mafai, Raphael embodies the highest expression of the conformist artist, he who seeks to give form and expression to his contemporary society's conventional spirit. On the other hand, Michelangelo, by questioning the conventionality of the society in which he lives, appears able to foresee the deficiencies of his own time and paves the way to new forms of disruption and renewal. Mafai compares some painters

¹¹ *Rinascita* was the cultural-political journal of the Italian Communist Party. It was first published in Salerno in June 1944 before moving to Rome in the October of the same year. In 1962 the journal became a weekly magazine.

¹² Mario Mafai, 'Possibilità per un'arte nuova', *Rinascita*, 3 (1945), 89-91 (p. 89).

¹³ Mafai, p. 90.

of his own time, such as Matisse and Dufy in France or De Pisis and Paulucci in Italy, to Raphael's approach, while he considers painters such as Picasso and Soutine, Carrà, Morandi and Scipione the 'Michelangelos' of his time.

Mafai's opposition between Raphael and Michelangelo reflects an ideological dichotomy between conformist and heretical art, in which the first typology emerges from a direct emanation of the dominant ideology while the second one, by assuming an external perspective, is able to dissect and question the most basic assumptions of the time in which the artist operates. It is from this heretical approach to art, according to Mafai, that postwar artists should draw inspiration, in order to establish a new aesthetic. The new artist should indeed be able to express the ferment of the postwar period by channelling all the vitality and energy of the new historical condition:

Ripensando a quei vent'anni e più di letargo, dove le cose e gli uomini sembravano verniciati di una patina opaca d'ipocrisia su uno scenario di cartone dorato, farebbe piacere sperare un'arte più serena che s'ispirasse a un nuovo ideale di bellezza dove l'artista ritrovi e sciolga il canto alla vita e all'avvenire.¹⁴

1.2. The Re-emergence of the Marginal

What the first important books published in the aftermath of the wartime period attest is the resurgence, from the depths of the collective unconscious, of what had previously been submerged. In postwar Italy, elements previously removed – fragments and detritus of life stories, anecdotes of negated existences, acts of suppressions or self-constraint caused by the dramatic life conditions in the Italy of fascism and of the early 1940s – were unexpectedly re-emerging. This process, which using Freud's terminology we could define as the 'return of the repressed',¹⁵ appears to characterize the most

¹⁴ Mafai, p. 91.

¹⁵ See Sigmund Freud, 'Moses and Monotheism', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Vintage, 2001), XXIII, pp. 7-137.

successful literary cases of the immediate postwar period. Works such as Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (1946), Italo Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1947), or Alberto Moravia's *Racconti romani* (1954) are books which symptomatically re-inscribed into the collective imagination characters and groups – respectively, the southern peasants of the Basilicata, the child, and the lower classes inhabiting Rome's poorest neighbourhoods – who had been excluded, marginalized or disciplined within the social context of fascist Italy.¹⁶ The same argument could be made for poetry collections such as Pasolini's *Poesie a Casarsa* (1942), which disrupted the fascist attempt to erase dialects in the name of a language purified by 'dialettismi' and 'forestierismi'; or for the poems and paintings of the Portonaccio group, which included writers such as Elio Filippo Accrocca and artists such as Renzo Vespi gnani and Armando Buratti, who depicted the degradation of the Roman peripheries, shattered by the war.¹⁷ A similar change of perspective towards an aesthetic of the street is also noticeable in many neorealist films such as Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943), Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta* (1945), or De Sica's *Sciuscià* (1946) and *Ladri di biciclette* (1948), in which tramps, young boys, orphans and beggars populate the scene and often become the focal point through which the story is narrated.

Among the literary critics of the time, Antonio Russi emerged as one of the first to propose an analysis of this aesthetic shift in *Poesia e realtà*.¹⁸ Russi defines the years between the outbreak of the First World War and the end of the Second World War as a period of cultural crisis. For him, the literary symptoms of this crisis could be detected

In the essay Freud described the mechanism of repression functioning within collective groups: 'Early trauma – defence – latency – outbreak of neurotic illness – partial return of the repressed. The reader is now invited to take the step of supposing that something occurred in the life of human species similar to what occurs in the life of individuals' (p. 80).

¹⁶ See Italo Calvino, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (Turin: Einaudi, 1947); Carlo Levi, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (Turin: Einaudi, 1945); Alberto Moravia, *Racconti romani* (Milan: Bompiani, 1954).

¹⁷ See Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Poesie a Casarsa', in *Tutte le poesie*, ed. by Walter Siti, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), I, 9-106; Elio Filippo Accrocca, *Portonaccio* (Milan: All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1949).

¹⁸ Antonio Russi, *Poesia e realtà* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1962). See also Antonio Russi, *Gli anni dell'antialienazione: dall'ermetismo al neorealismo*, 1943-1949 (Milan: Mursia, 1966).

in the purified and obscure language of the ‘prosa d’arte’ and hermeticist poetry, a literary language that he labelled ‘poesia dell’indifferenza’, and which reflected a detachment from the concreteness of life.¹⁹ In Russi’s reading, symbolism and the *fin de siècle* aestheticist call for *l’art pour l’art* had soon degenerated into a dry language, leading to the departure of concrete objects and things from the artist’s observation point:

C’è nell’ultima poesia, una oscurità apparente che è un prodotto dell’indifferenza, dell’incapacità di scelta, del rifiuto degli oggetti. [...] In questo caso estremo, non si può più parlare di simbolismo, né di poetica delle ‘corrispondenze’. [...] L’oscurità dell’ultima poesia coincide col suo distacco dalla vita.²⁰

The literary paradigm of the ‘poetry of indifference’, which dominated Italian literary writing for decades following the lesson of Carducci and D’Annunzio, ultimately leading to the formation of the ‘prosa d’arte’, had for Russi to be overcome by a new, more vivid and committed paradigm, based on a more direct observation of life in all its forms. For Russi, early symptoms of this change of perspective included Gramsci’s *Quaderni dal carcere* (1948), Ignazio Silone’s novel *Fontamara* (1933) and the first books of Moravia, Elio Vittorini and Carlo Levi.²¹ A common thread between all these different writers was detected by Russi in the return of topography in many of their works – a move for which Russi coined the expression ‘fare pace con la geografia’ – as shown by their will to name places and locations:

Basta sfogliare le riviste italiane nate durante o subito dopo la guerra: Aretusa, Mercurio, Risorgimento ecc. e vi si troverà documentata questa esigenza di *rifare la pace con la geografia*. Da essa emersero a poco a poco la Milano di Quasimodo, la ‘Roma occupata’ di Ungaretti, la Firenze del 1944-45 intravista – a brevi lampi – in passi di Montale e di Saba. [...] La geografia fisica era la proiezione di una geografia interiore. La quale era poi nient’altro che una riscoperta del reale. Se

¹⁹ Russi, *Poesia e realtà*, p. 349: ‘Di qui si spiega come la poesia dell’indifferenza non riesca ad affermare una realtà. Essa non lavora tanto sugli oggetti, quanto sulla loro ombra’.

²⁰ Russi, *Poesia e realtà*, p. 354.

²¹ Russi refers to works such as Moravia’s *Gli indifferenti* (1929) and *La mascherata* (1941), Vittorini’s *Conversazione in Sicilia* (1941), and Levi’s *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*.

esiste una differenza importante fra la letteratura anteguerra e quella di oggi è proprio in questa necessità, sempre più accentuata, di fare i conti con le cose.²²

Russi's discourse on the 'return of the real' seems to be based on a twofold reflection. On the one hand he diagnoses a cultural fracture provoked by the experiences of modernity and fascism, which reached their climax in the trauma of the Second World War. On the other hand, in order to create the basis for a new aesthetic which could overcome the experiences of symbolism and hermeticism, he looks for early symptoms of this change of perspective in the works of intellectuals such as Gramsci, Carlo Levi and Pavese, who represented a sort of 'foreign element' within the body of fascism.

However, for Russi the perception of a change of perspective should not remain pure speculation, but had to materialize in the active identification of writers able to embody the new aesthetic. This was the motivation behind the publication of the first issue of the poetry journal *La strada* in 1946, a few weeks before the national elections that would ratify the end of the Italian monarchy and the beginning of the Republic. The journal, printed by a Roman union of independent publishers called Nuovi Editori Riuniti, promoted a new poetic language, far from the narrowness of hermeticism and tending towards a documentary and 'impure' attitude towards reality.²³ This periodical never achieved great popularity and ceased publication after only three issues, but it was nonetheless symptomatic of the process of construction of the new aesthetic.

La strada emblematically captures the announced change of perspective – from 'above' to 'below' – and it represented an essential contribution to the definition of a new literary language, parallel to that of cinematic neorealism, which left important traces and legacies in the literary production of the following years. The title of the journal is itself revealing, and suggests a departure of the artist from the 'ivory tower' in

²² Russi, *Poesia e realtà*, p. 414 [my emphasis].

²³ For an historical contextualization of the poetry periodicals published in the second postwar period see Sergio Pautasso, 'Le riviste di poesia del dopoguerra', *Aut aut*, 61-62 (1961), 143-61.

the name of a humbler and more committed idea of literature, capable of recollecting those elements – vividly simple in their squalid truth – which had been repressed during fascism. For Russi, the model of this unorthodox approach to reality was Giovanni Parini, the opponent of the eighteenth-century Arcadia, who ‘faceva per oggetto di poesia argomenti di igiene cittadina, quali oggi a mala pena si concepirebbero affidati alla cronaca giornalistica [...] di qui la nostra insegna: *La strada*’.²⁴

The leading article of the first issue, written by Russi himself, is both a judgment on the state of art during the fascist dictatorship and a call for a break with that past. Russi judges very critically the paradigm of ‘poesia pura’ which had characterized the poetic production of the previous period, in that ‘tutta questa letteratura manca di tempo preciso, perchè manca di impegno’.²⁵ In this respect, the position of *La strada* seems quite different from that of other journals such as *La fiera letteraria* or *Rinascita*. Far from mediating with the past aesthetic experience of hermeticism or symbolism, Russi calls for a Copernican revolution of the artistic gaze. For him, the postwar artist should move his/her gaze from the heights of the hyper-intellectualistic experiences of hermeticism and of the ‘prosa d’arte’ to the depths of the street, in order to incorporate its wasted and impure materials:

La Strada non è dunque una rivista di poesia pura e tanto meno di poesia ermetica. È anzi proprio il contrario di tutto questo. Tuttavia essa non presenta alcun manifesto e non sostituisce alla posizione ermetica se non una condizione ovvia che ad essa mancava: l’affetto per la verità, il rispetto per il documento umano, il rifiuto della mistificazione e soprattutto della malafede.²⁶

Lingua, stile, valori formali, presi per sé, sono parole senza significato. Il miglior modo di curare lo stile è quello di non guardare soltanto allo stile. Perché la parola è sempre la mediazione di un suono e di un senso. Né l’autorità di una lingua è mai dettata dall’ambizione dello stile; ma dalla grandezza e dalla vastità delle esperienze vissute da quelli che la parlano e, ancor di più, da quelli che la scrivono. E un nuovo stile non può nascere, senza aderire a una nuova esperienza della vita.²⁷

²⁴ Antonio Russi, ‘Introduzione’, *La strada*, 1 (1946), 3-17 (p. 15).

²⁵ Russi, ‘Introduzione’, p. 3.

²⁶ Russi, ‘Introduzione’, p. 11.

²⁷ Russi, ‘Introduzione’, p. 17.

Russi's article seems therefore to call for a break with the past in terms of attitude and perspective. Hermeticist poetry is not only criticised for its intrinsic use of refined and abstract words that are difficult to grasp, but above all for its elitist and hyper-intellectualistic relationship with reality. Precisely for this reason, the new writer should re-adjust the lens, turning it towards reality, in the name of a more direct participation within society, and in order to bear witness to the traumatized and shattered humanity that had just emerged from the experience of the war.

La strada published poems written, among others, by authors such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Franco Fortini and Cesare Pavese, as well as less known authors such as Antonio Ernazza and Sebastiano Ciuffino. These poems testified to a landscape of ruins, where the war had left behind a territory composed of destroyed cities, empty stations, wandering homeless people and dusty streets. An example is Ernazza's 'All'est sul limite estremo', written during the war, which describes a dramatic scene in which a man awaiting his death is surrounded by the 'ultimi gridi soffocati di fanciulli e intorno scorie, rifiuti / e polvere di calce a vedermi morire'.²⁸ Similarly, Ciuffino's 'Sosta notturna alla periferia', depicts a shattered cityscape where tramps and homeless people can find a place to sleep in 'misere case' where 'un uomo in un angolo buio / s'è fatto un giaciglio di carte'.²⁹ In another poem entitled 'Notte. Tregua tra gli uomini', Ciuffino portrays an exhausted humanity which populates a city in which '[I]ungo le pubbliche strade / frustano gli affamati le vetrine; / dormono al sole meridiano / sui carretti i facchini. / [...] Cadono sfatte le donne / sui pavimenti lisciati / - nessuno sa le vergogne / delle porte serrate'.³⁰

What we can draw from these examples is that, in specific Roman circles such as that of Russi, the movement from hermeticist to postwar literature is interpreted as the

²⁸ Antonio Ernazza, 'All'est sul limite estremo', *La Strada*, 1 (1946), 19.

²⁹ Sebastiano Ciuffino, 'Sosta notturna alla periferia', *La Strada*, 2 (1946), 14.

³⁰ Ciuffino, 'Notte. Tregua tra gli uomini', *La Strada*, 2 (1946), 16.

movement marking a fall, a descent from the heights of purism and abstraction to the depths of lived and concrete life, no matter how tragic or miserable. The artist is now pushed to look at the world from a lower perspective, investigating everything that overflows from and onto the street. Furthermore, and in spite of their differences, what all the debates carried out in literary journals seem to suggest – from Mafai’s distinction between ‘conservative’ and ‘progressive’ art, to Russi’s suggestions for a drastic break with the past, to Petrucciani’s severe judgment on the art of the *ventennio* – is the need for a top-down reversal of the artistic gaze, moving from the ivory tower to the bottom of the street. It is a descending trajectory which seems to indicate the liberation of the artist from the oppressive burden of a dictatorship that pushed him almost to the extreme of incommunicability. Now, at the end of a traumatic world war and after twenty years of fascism which had explicitly or implicitly pushed the intellectual into a defensive position, the artist could finally restart his observation of the world from the investigation of the marginalized and the repressed.

1.3. Urban and Aesthetic Re-configurations: Rome’s Cityscape and the Time-Image

The fact that *La strada* was printed in Rome and that the majority of the ‘urban poems’ published in the journal depicted the degradation of Rome and its peripheries should not be considered coincidental, as in the course of the first decades of the twentieth century the Italian capital had acquired a renewed centrality in the imagery of urban Italy. As already mentioned, the modernization of Rome had been an essential aspect of the country’s *fascistizzazione* operated by Mussolini, thanks to a glorious heritage which had offered the architects of the regime the possibility to reuse, in a manipulative way, the archaeological ruins of the classical city. This centrality, together with the

enlargement of the state's ministerial apparatuses, brought to the city a huge mass of immigrants from the poorest areas of Southern and North-Eastern Italy, which made of the capital the country's biggest metropolis, overtaking Milan and reaching the symbolic number of one million inhabitants during the 1930s. This demographic explosion, together with the need to redesign the historical centre according to the precepts of the urban planners of the regime, led to a series of urban changes which materialized in the destruction of entire residential areas within the boundaries of the city centre and the construction of new peripheries, called 'borgate', outside the former limits of the city.

Moreover, the master plan approved in 1931 established the ground for the construction of new, hyper-populated residential areas between the Salaria and the Appia roads, and of detached and semi-detached houses for the upper classes between the Cassia and the Portuense roads. This plan, which promoted a topographical division between a bourgeois Western Rome and a more popular Eastern Rome, was thought up with a view to a doubling of the population, which was expected to reach two million within the following twenty-five years.³¹ Furthermore, in 1935 Mussolini's urban planners decided to build an entirely new 'modern Rome' completely detached from the body of the old city, the E42 (later renamed EUR), which was originally planned for completion in time to mark the 1942 Universal Exhibition,³² and was supposed to become the economic and financial centre of the modern city. Thus, when Italy entered the war in 1940, Rome was an enormous construction site, and once the war ended, in 1945, the impossibility of completing all the renovations that had been planned, together with the debris left by the passage of the war, produced a semi-destroyed cityscape, marked by huge voids between the various parts of the city which had not yet

³¹ See Vittorio Vidotto, *Roma contemporanea* (Bari and Rome: Laterza, 2006), pp. 296-304.

³² However, the 1942 Universal Exposition never took place because of the outbreak of the war in 1939.

been completed.³³ As Casetti has written, between the 1920s and the 1940s, ‘si crea [...] una città nuova, basata su tessuti residenziali diversi – a trama frantumata e a tracciato irregolare, oppure densi e sviluppati in altezza – differenziati a seconda del ceto sociale’.³⁴ In the immediate postwar period, Rome appeared as a city based on the opposition between centre and periphery, and ‘modellata da una pluralità di ordini urbani, unificati solo dalla continuità del tracciato viario’.³⁵

This evocative cityscape, in which the ancient ruins that had survived the passing of time had been integrated with the new ruins produced by the war, was captured by a series of movies in the postwar period. Films such as Rossellini’s *Roma città aperta* (1945) and *Paisà* (1946), or De Sica’s *Sciuscià* (1946) and *Ladri di biciclette* (1948), magnificently captured the striking desolation of this historical transition, providing us with an extraordinary testimony, not only of people’s living conditions but also of the exceptional state of Rome’s city space.³⁶ The fact that in the postwar period Rome became the setting of many neorealist films has led some commentators to consider that movement a direct expression of postwar Roman culture.³⁷ The critic Mario Verdone, for example, noted that ‘la romanità del neo-realismo è geografica, promozionale e tematica’:³⁸ geographical because it established itself with films shot in Rome such as the ones mentioned above; promotional because the films were supported by Cinecittà’s

³³ For a detailed historical account of Rome’s twentieth-century urbanization, see Italo Insolera, *Roma moderna: un secolo di storia urbanistica 1870-1970* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001); Leonardo Benevolo, *Roma dal 1870 al 1990* (Bari and Rome: Laterza, 1992); Vittorio Vidotto, *Roma contemporanea*; Roberto Casetti and Gianfranco Spagnesi (eds), *Roma contemporanea: storia e progetto* (Rome: Gangemi, 2006).

³⁴ Roberto Casetti, ‘Il ruolo delle “funzioni centrali” nella costruzione di un nuovo ordine urbano della città contemporanea’, in *Roma contemporanea*, ed. by Casetti and Spagnesi, pp. 67-107 (p. 68).

³⁵ Casetti, ‘Il ruolo delle “funzioni centrali”’, p. 68.

³⁶ For a study of the intrinsic relationship between postwar cinema and the Italian urban landscape see Noa Steimatsky, *Italian Locations: Reinhabiting the Past in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2008).

³⁷ See Mario Verdone, ‘Neorealismo: un cinema che nasce a Roma’, *Studi romani*, 27.1 (1979), 50-58. In the article Verdone writes: ‘Chi si interroga sulle origini del neo-realismo cinematografico italiano ferma subito la propria attenzione su questi film: *Roma città aperta*, *Sciuscià*, *Ladri di biciclette*. È sufficiente per stabilire che il neo-realismo ha preso il via proprio a Roma, e la conferma giunge con più precisione ed evidenza immediate da quello che viene considerato l’atto di nascita del film neo-realista, *Roma città aperta*, realizzato tra il 1944 e il 1945 da Roberto Rossellini, romano’ (p. 51).

³⁸ Verdone, p. 53.

production companies, based in Rome; and thematic because the subjects of many of these films were specifically taken from Roman historical events such as the Resistance, the Liberation or the miserable living conditions of the immediate postwar period.

While one could argue that many important Italian films – whether neorealist or otherwise – released in the immediate postwar period were *not* based in Rome, if we move from Verdone’s factual and topographical analysis of neorealism to a topological and aesthetic one, then the strict intertwining between neorealism and Rome’s urbanscape appears even more convincing.

In what could be defined as an ‘aesthetic geology’ of Italian neorealism, André Bazin highlighted the strict relationship between neorealist cinema and the Italian urban landscape.³⁹ After defining the neorealist aesthetic as a *découpage* based on gaps and ellipses that reproduce a fragmented reality structured in blocs, he observes how this feature was linked to the quality of the Italian landscape:

the use of natural setting and real landscapes may be the decisive quality of cinematic neo-realism. [...] Italian cities, both old and modern, are tremendously photogenic. Urban planning in Italy since Antiquity has consistently been theatrical and decorative. [...] Even in the poorest neighbourhoods the coralline agglomeration of houses, with their terraces and balconies, gives rise to outstandingly spectacular possibilities.⁴⁰

Given the fact that for Bazin the Italian urbanscape strongly informed the aesthetic of neorealism and that, as we saw, the bond between neorealism and Rome was particularly strong, the strict relationship between Rome’s emptied and fragmented cityscape and the neorealist aesthetic appears reinforced. If ‘style becomes the internal

³⁹ André Bazin, *Bazin At Work, Major Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*, ed. by Bert Cardullo (London: Routledge, 1997). For a discussion of Bazin’s theory of cinema, also in relation to the Italian cityscape, see Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2012), pp. 1-68.

⁴⁰ Bazin, p. 247.

dynamic of narrative’,⁴¹ then the internal dynamic that inspired the neorealist image had to stylistically absorb and integrate Rome’s cityscape within its inner structure.

A sort of correspondence between Rome’s cityscape and the neorealist aesthetic appears also implicit in Gilles Deleuze’s analysis of the cinematic image. In *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*,⁴² by aiming to trace the passage from the two-dimensional and consequential image of early cinema (the movement-image) to the multidimensional and anachronistic image of later cinema (the time-image), Deleuze assigns to neorealism a decisive role. According to Deleuze, neorealism developed and established a new aesthetic based on a different conception of space and time ‘said to be dispersive, elliptical, errant or wavering, working in blocs, with deliberately weak connections and floating events’.⁴³ What I would argue is that in such a description of the time-image we could recognize, by analogy, traces and signs of Rome’s postwar topography – characterized by a dispersive urban space in which the ruins of the ancient city are interspersed with the debris of the modern city and with the half-built urban blocs of the fascist city.

Though this relationship between Rome’s cityscape and the time-image will be developed more in the next chapter, it might be worth introducing the argument here. For Deleuze, the main contribution brought about by the time-image is the creation of a ‘de-subjectivized’ cinematic image, relying on a different concept of time, which is anti-chronological and characterized by the constant interference of *déjà vu*. This dynamic, which materializes, for example, in the abandonment of sensory-motor schemata, as in the wandering without specific direction of Antonio in *Ladri di biciclette* (fig. 1.3), also reflects the disruption of linear and measurable time in the

⁴¹ Bazin, p. 233.

⁴² Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1986) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1989).

⁴³ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 1.

name of an internal and anti-chronological one. Again, in the development of this anti-linear and temporally multistable aesthetic, the role played by the urban landscape of Rome seems to play an important part, as this shift seems strongly informed by the city's palimpsestial conformation, in which the past has constantly been incorporated into the present through the preservation of its different historical layers.⁴⁴



Fig. 1.3: Antonio's desperate attempt to find his bike after the theft at the crossroad between via del Tritone and via del Traforo in *Ladri di biciclette*.

Bazin's and Deleuze's discourses on neorealism, and the importance of Rome for the creation of a European postwar cinema, lead us to a more general aesthetic issue, which encompasses artistic languages other than the cinematic one, such as poetry and narrative. As demonstrated by the intellectual debates in postwar Roman journals, the need to establish the ground for a change of perspective which could produce a different aesthetic – more participatory and inclusive – was a topic that went beyond the small circle of intellectuals that is commonly recognized as 'neorealist'. The experience of

⁴⁴ The representation of Rome's cityscape as a palimpsest – literally, a parchment on which layers of text are written, (partially) erased and re-written – is associated with Freud's comparison between Rome and the human mind: '[n]ow let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past - an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one'. See Sigmund Freud, 'Civilization and Its Discontents', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth, 1953-1974), XXI, pp. 59-148 (p. 70).

Russi's *La strada*, for example, demonstrated the attempt to promote a new aesthetic of the marginal, without immediately drawing on the canonized precepts of neorealism, such as those promoted by Cesare Zavattini, the recognized theorist of the movement.⁴⁵ In light of this, a departure from a view of neorealism as a school limited to a small and definite group of filmmakers and writers – from Rossellini, De Sica, Visconti and Pietro Germi, to Calvino, Pratolini and Vittorini – appears necessary. Precisely for this reason, from now on I will replace the expression *neorealist aesthetic* with *aesthetics of the marginal*.

1.4. A City of Margins: Postwar Rome in Accrocca, Moravia, Ortese and Levi

As we have seen following the debates in Roman literary journals, postwar Rome was emerging as a place in which different forces and tensions condensed and interacted. In the capital, the hope for the country's better future was accompanied by the desire to come to terms with a past that risked overshadowing the present. At the same time this turmoil was also reflected, within the artistic field, in the necessity for the artist to redefine his role in society. Among the Rome-based journals of the time, Antonio Russi's *La Strada* emerged, as we have seen, as an emblematic example of the desire to trace a line of demarcation between the fascist period and the democratic present, promoting a calibration of the writer's gaze towards an aesthetic of the street. What we could say is that this new aesthetic constituted a response to the general willingness to verbalize and textualize what had been repressed during the coercive years of the fascist regime, and that this renewed faith in the possibilities of art not only led the artist to register people's euphoric reaction to the historical transition, but also pushed him/her to recollect fragments and sediments of a reality perceived as sorrowful and desolate.

⁴⁵ See Cesare Zavattini, *Neorealismo ecc.*, ed. by Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 1979).

The perhaps unexpected consequence of this re-adjustment of the artistic gaze towards the street was the resurfacing of a previously submerged reality composed of dust, garbage and refuse. This ambivalent situation, in which enthusiasm overlapped with degradation, is the common thread of different postwar accounts of the city that have to be taken into account in order to get to the core of the apparently contradictory complexities characterizing this historical moment. Vittorio Vidotto explains how the liberation from Nazi-fascism, which occurred in Rome on 4 June 1944, produced in the city an atmosphere of both uncertainty and excitement. This ambivalence was a consequence of the fact that the process of purging the city from the fascist past was still an on-going one, whose results remained unsure:

Il tema dell'epurazione era uno dei molti elementi che tenevano la città, liberata dalla paura ma priva di prospettive concrete, in uno stato di incertezza ed eccitazione. La vita culturale sembrava trarre vitalità da questa atmosfera. Mostre d'arte, teatro, editoria, tutto appariva contrassegnato da un'accelerazione che riprendeva molti stimoli maturati nei mesi di guerra, ma si configurava come un nuovo avvio, una rinascita.⁴⁶

According to Vidotto, this was a transitory situation in which the legacy of the fascist past seemed still to overshadow Rome's present. At the same time, the fact that Rome's rebirth was characterized by this situation of vagueness also produced positive effects, which materialized in people's desire to engage in diverse social and cultural activities, such as art exhibitions and theatre performances.

In the postwar period Rome reacquired a central position in the nation not only politically, as the Italian capital, but also culturally. Despite the fact that the country's most important publishing houses, such as Einaudi, Mondadori or Bompiani, were located in Milan and Turin, the printing houses of the capital were supporting the high demand of many independent editors, and of smaller publishers such as Astrolabio, De Luca or Curcio. Moreover, the artistic meeting-places of the capital, such as Caffè

⁴⁶ Vidotto, p. 259.

Greco and Caffè Aragno, the English Babington tearoom in Piazza di Spagna, and the bars Rosati and Donay in Via Veneto, were always crowded and characterized by lively discussions on the state of art, politics and cinema.⁴⁷

Literary and journalistic accounts of the same period register the buoyant atmosphere of the Italian capital, confirming simultaneously the enthusiasm for the construction of a better future and the need to bear witness to the scars of a traumatic past. Anna Maria Ortese's description of postwar Rome as characterized by a 'straordinaria euforia',⁴⁸ Elio Filippo Accrocca's feeling of going through a period of 'forsennata rinascita',⁴⁹ and Carlo Levi's dubbing of the Italian capital as 'Roma fuggitiva',⁵⁰ are markers of the excitement surrounding Rome at this particular time. Furthermore, they also represent a starting point in the process of delineation of a powerful image which a few years later will evolve into Pasolini's 'stupenda e misera città' and Fellini's Rome of the 'dolce vita'.⁵¹ Isolated and degraded peripheries, anonymous streets and buildings, shanty houses and barracks became, during the immediate postwar period, the privileged investigation points from which to capture the essence of the city's mood.

Emblematic in this respect is the change of perspective operated by an author such as Alberto Moravia who, in his *Racconti romani*, turned his attention to the daily life of a myriad of humble figures such as that of the poor, the unemployed or the tramp. These stories, written between the end of the war and the early 1950s for the third page of the *Corriere della sera* and collected in a volume in 1954, are characterized by the desire to

⁴⁷ For a picture of the cultural environment of postwar Rome see Eugenio Scalfari, *La sera andavamo in via Veneto* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009); and Stephen Gundle, *Death and the Dolce Vita: The Dark Side of Rome in the 1950s* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011).

⁴⁸ See Anna Maria Ortese, *La lente scura*, ed. by Luca Clerici (Milan: Adelphi, 2004), p. 39.

⁴⁹ Accrocca, quoted in Maria Armellino, *Elio Filippo Accrocca, interprete e testimone del suo tempo* (Rome: Fermenti, 2002), p. 17.

⁵⁰ Cf. Carlo Levi, *Roma fuggitiva* (Rome: Donzelli, 2002).

⁵¹ Here I am referring to the image of Rome stemming from Pasolini's representation of Rome's peripheries in novels such as *Ragazzi di vita* (1955) and *Una vita violenta* (1957), and films such as *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962); and Fellini's depiction of Rome in the film *La dolce vita* (1959). Pasolini's and Fellini's representations of Rome will be discussed in greater detail in the following section of this thesis.

depict the living conditions of common Roman people. At the same time, they demonstrate a topographical change in Moravia's representation of Rome, which is no longer the aristocratic and almost invisible city compressed within the walls of the grand villas of Monteverde Vecchio, as in his first novels,⁵² but is rather the extroverted and marginalized city of Trastevere, Testaccio or Ostiense.⁵³ The Rome that emerges from Moravia's stories represents a departure from the official and pompous city of fascism, and no trace remains of its pretentious magniloquence. At the same time, the spatial geography of the city is inscribed into its literary cartography through a constant desire to position characters and set situations in recognizable locations. Semi-destroyed stations, garbage dumps and shacks, as well as desolate streets and squares are the anonymous places in which Moravia's stories unravel.

This aspect is exemplified by the story 'Scherzi del caldo', which takes place in the heat of the Roman summer. The first lines of this story seem immediately to confirm the downward perspective of the narrator within the space of the city:

D'estate, nelle case dei ricchi, si chiudono le finestre alla mattina e l'aria fresca della notte rimane nelle stanze ampie e oscure, dove, nella penombra, brillano specchi, pavimenti di marmo, mobili lucidati a cera. Tutto è a posto, tutto è pulito, ordinato, nitido; perfino il silenzio è un silenzio fresco, riposante, buio [...]. Ma nelle case dei poveri le cose vanno diversamente. Col primo giorno di caldo, l'afa entra nelle tue stanzette affogate e non se ne va più via. Vuoi bere ma dal rubinetto, in cucina, viene giù un'acqua calda che pare brodo. In casa non ti puoi più muovere: sembra che ogni cosa, mobili, vestiti, utensili, si sia gonfiata e ti caschi addosso.⁵⁴

This passage moves from the description of the aristocratic houses of the city centre – where everything seems luxurious and tidy – to the houses inhabited by poor people –

⁵² Cf. Victoria Tillson, 'A Nearly Invisible City: Rome in Alberto Moravia's 1950s Fiction', *Annali d'italianistica*, 28 (2010), 237-56.

⁵³ See Russi, *Poesia e realtà*, p. 418: 'La Roma ultima di Moravia, per esempio, non è più quella di prima: i quartieri e i loro immediati dintorni e la tipica vicenda che in essi si svolgeva [...] hanno ceduto il posto alle borgate periferiche o ai quartieri popolari e a certi caratteristici tipi fra il bullo e il perdigiorno, con una vivacità di colore e di movimento che certo deve molto al cinema recente e al suo "parlato". Ne viene fuori una Roma veramente "vista", con certi angoli, situazioni e figure che non possono essere se non romani e che tali si sentono subito da chi legge'.

⁵⁴ Moravia, *Racconti romani*, p. 11.

where even the air, not to mention the furniture, expresses a sense of oppression and degradation. The *Racconti romani* are indeed representative of Moravia's turn away from the psychological investigation of the upper classes, as in the novels *Gli indifferenti* (1929) and *Le ambizioni sbagliate* (1935), to those humbler social classes that constituted the belly of the postwar city, and which also found expression in works such as *La romana* (1947) or *La ciociara* (1957).

The geography of the story is also indicative of this shift, as the author set it in Ostiense, at the time the only industrial area of the city and a residential neighbourhood for Rome's working class. After a brief description of his house, we follow Ernesto wandering around the Ostiense neighbourhood after leaving home because of a fight with his wife. Ostiense's urban area is depicted very vividly and emerges as a sort of counter image to that of the post-card image of Rome. The river Tiber is compared to a sewer and Ostiense's gasholder, the 'Gazometro', to a skeleton:

Il Tevere, incassato tra le banchine, in fondo ai muraglioni a sghembo, pareva, anche per il colore fangoso, una fogna allo scoperto. Il gasometro che sembra uno scheletro rimasto da un incendio, gli altiforni delle officine del gas, le torri dei silos, le tubature dei serbatoi di petrolio, i tetti aguzzi della centrale termoelettrica chiudevano l'orizzonte così da far pensare di non essere a Roma ma in qualche città industriale del Nord.⁵⁵

From this perspective the city appears as something completely different from both the pompous and rhetorical city of fascism, and from the Eternal city of the Grand Tour tradition. As Keala Jewell has argued, in this story 'Ostiense gathers scorching industrial and human wastes at once'.⁵⁶ It is a place where modernity seems to have left its traces in constructions such as factories and iron structures, and in which the once legendary Tiber is now reduced to murky wetland. Moravia's Rome resembles more the

⁵⁵ Moravia, *Racconti romani*, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Keala Jewell, 'A Postmodern Gaze on the Gasometer', in *Rome, Postmodern Narratives of a Cityscape*, ed. by Dom Holdaway and Filippo Trentin (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), pp. 119-136 (p. 127).

industrial scenery of places like Sesto San Giovanni near Milan, or the industrial areas of Turin and Genoa, than the mythical city of classical tradition.

In this uncanny setting Ernesto loses his way, ending up in an unrecognizable place where all the rubbish of the city is collected:

Dapprima camminai per una strada asfaltata, regolare, benché tra campi brulli sparsi di mondezze; poi la strada diventò un viottolo terroso e le mondezze diventarono mucchi alti, quasi collinette. Pensai che ero capitato proprio nel luogo dove vanno a scaricare tutte le mondezze di Roma: non si vedeva un filo d'erba, ma soltanto cartacce, scatolame rugginoso, torsoli, detriti, in una luce che accecava, con un puzzo acido di roba andata a male. Mi sentivo sperduto, come chi non abbia più voglia di andare avanti e d'altra parte non vorrebbe tornare indietro.⁵⁷

Ernesto's stroll terminates in a dumping ground in which all the city's detritus and wasted materials are accumulated. In this place, in which wastepaper, rusty cans and rotten food are piled together, he encounters a little girl and her mother, Elvira, who live in a tin-plated barrack in which shoes, clothes, dishware and other things hang from the ceiling. Elvira – 'un mucchio di cenci'⁵⁸ according to Ernesto's impression – is apparently waiting for her husband to return home, although we know from a passer-by that he died during the war. Dramatically, the woman has cancelled this event from her memory and confuses Ernesto with the dead husband. This scene shocks Ernesto so much that he flees from the place and decides to return home to his family.

In spite of the banal plot, based on a quite mechanical narrative dynamic in which the poor man stops complaining about his situation after having witnessed the living condition of even poorer people, what seems relevant for our argument is that the story allegorically puts at the centre of the scene Rome's ultimate margins. Elvira and her daughter live outside the city's threshold, in a place where everything that is rejected and eliminated by those who live within the urban boundaries is collected. They are the

⁵⁷ Moravia, *Racconti romani*, p. 13.

⁵⁸ Moravia, *Racconti romani*, p. 14.

city's ultimate rejects, as they inhabit an inhuman space that could be compared to a sort of underworld. At the same time, they also embody the memory trace of an historical collective trauma, as their out-cast condition is a result of the death of Elvira's husband during the war. They are symptoms of the city's repressed memory, spectres that populate and haunt the city's collective unconscious, as confirmed by the fact that when, after a few days, Ernesto decides to go back to Elvira's place, this seems to have vanished into thin air, without leaving any trace.

A similar tension between the city of the living and that of the dead emerges in Elio Filippo Accrocca's portrayal of Rome in *Portonaccio*. Published in 1947, this book aimed to bear witness to postwar Rome from a peripheral point of view, at the same time highlighting the traces left by the war on the urban landscape of the city. The epigraph of the book explains the choice of the title: 'Portonaccio è un ponte sulla ferrovia, è un quartiere di povera gente. Gli uomini da vivi lo ignorano, da morti lo abitano'.⁵⁹ Portonaccio, an area within the Pietralata neighbourhood along the via Tiburtina, was also the name of the bridge connecting the old Tiburtina road with the area of Portonaccio, which were otherwise divided by the railway. This area, which suffered many dramatic bombings during the war, in the immediate postwar period acquired a highly symbolic value among writers and painters such as Renzo Vespignani, Armando Buratti and the same Accrocca, as it was considered an allegory of Rome's most atrocious sufferings. This group of artists, also called 'Scuola di Portonaccio', aimed to record and recollect signs, traces and wounds left by the war. Giuseppe Ungaretti highlighted this aspect of their work in the introduction to Accrocca's book, defining the language and the aesthetic of the group as characterized by the conviction

⁵⁹ Accrocca, *Portonaccio*, p. 1.

that 'la verità è nella tragica pietà delle cose'.⁶⁰ After mentioning, alongside Accrocca, the painters Vespignani and Buratti, Ungaretti writes:

Già si dice che è una scuola, la scuola del Portonaccio, dal nome di quel rione che essi abitano in case colpite dalla guerra, tra una stazione ferroviaria, un ponte, il cimitero, gli Ospedali, la città degli Studi. [...] È certo che la poesia di Accrocca è la più refrattaria a farsi attanagliare in regole che non siano quelle reclamate dalla propria ispirazione. È, la sua, una voce d'estrema tenerezza davanti alla terribilità degli eventi, voce d'una tenerezza quasi silenziosa per la sua intensità di commozione davanti a inermi povere cose, a poveri esseri travolti.⁶¹

As noted by Ungaretti, by lingering with his gaze on the most degraded areas of the city and on the life of the most defenceless human beings, Accrocca gives shape and voice to an alternative image of the Italian capital. Postwar Rome is for the young poet a city in which the vision of the present is interrupted by the emergence of traumatic memories that suddenly flash up. Around the Portonaccio's area the 'quartiere è sinistrato'⁶² and dead men are 'stesi sotto i marciapiedi'.⁶³ At the same time, it is also a visionary and metamorphosing place, in which dead friends reappear like ghosts in the light of the evening, in which street-lamps resemble votive candles and people's houses look like graves:

A filo di parete
s'accendono le case
con le finestre a rombo.

L'oscuramento termina ai fanali
le lampadine blu sono un ricordo
d'inverni clandestini.

Si rinnova
la Strada nel quartiere sinistrato.
La clinica Sant'Elena fa lume
alla memoria. Il tredici di Marzo
i morti stesi sotto i marciapiedi
i due cavalli aperti dalle schegge
all'angolo di viale Alfredo Rocco.
Fantasmi colorati dalla luce

⁶⁰ Giuseppe Ungaretti, 'Introduzione', in Accrocca, *Portonaccio*, p. 7.

⁶¹ Ungaretti, p. 8.

⁶² Accrocca, *Portonaccio*, p. 19.

⁶³ Accrocca, *Portonaccio*, p. 19.

di questa sera. I tortili lampioni
son lampade votive per le tombe
della mia strada.⁶⁴

In Accrocca's poem, precise geographical and historical references of the city accompany the re-emerging of the war's most traumatic memories. The time of the reconstruction is for the poet a time of recollection, in which walking alongside Viale Alfredo Rocco (now Viale Ippocrate), around the 'Sapienza' University area, causes flashbacks and involuntary memories of the war time. The sight of blue lights brings the poet's memory back to war-time winters, when he was in hiding, and the refurbishment of these streets awakens in his mind the image of the dead bodies that once covered the pavements of the same streets.

This area of Rome, which includes popular neighbourhoods such as Tiburtino, San Lorenzo and, on the outside of the Verano cemetery, the peripheral area of Portonaccio, was intensively hit by Allied bombings during 1943, and these neighbourhoods subsequently became the most symbolic locations of Rome's Resistance. During the infamous bombing that occurred on 19 July 1943, Accrocca's family home had been destroyed, pushing the young Elio Filippo to write:

Ho dormito l'ultima notte
nella casa di mio padre
al quartiere proletario.

La guerra aborto d'uomini
dementi, è passata sulla
mia casa di San Lorenzo.

Il cuore ha le sue distruzioni
come le macerie di spettri
eppure il cuore ancora grida,

geme, dispera, ma vive
come la Madonna di Raffaello
salvata tra i sassi della mia casa

⁶⁴ Accrocca, *Portonaccio*, p. 19.

e un paio di calzoni grigioverdi.⁶⁵

The condensing of these dramatic experiences triggers a topographical change, which moves the city's centre to its margins. For Accrocca, Portonaccio allowed the possibility of constructing an alternative aesthetic imaginary to that pursued by fascism, as expressed by symbolic landmarks of fascist architecture like Piazza Augusto Imperatore, or the E42. Mussolini's attempt to revive an aestheticized memory of the ancient empire is replaced, in Accrocca's work, by an aesthetic of the suffering and of the marginal, in which the actual memory of the war represents a traumatic break in the city's collective memory. Accrocca's Rome is a post-traumatized urbanscape in which the memory of destruction and of suffering continues to haunt the desire to reconstruct the city. For this reason, he also defined this historical moment as a period of 'forsennata rinascita', in which the adjective *forsennata* suggests the lack of stability and direction which affected the city's rebirth after the war. As Maria Armellino writes:

In questo clima di 'forsennata rinascita' Elio Filippo Accrocca si inserisce con tutto il suo entusiasmo giovanile e fa gruppo con i ragazzi – poeti e pittori – che si incontravano in quello che sarebbe diventato uno dei nuovi quartieri popolari del dopoguerra, a Roma: Portonaccio, che allora era una distesa di terreni incolti, disseminati qua e là da semplici baracche, nel quale rifluivano le scorie della guerra e che ben ne poteva rappresentare la desolazione, al limite dei quartieri bombardati.⁶⁶

As noted by Armellino, it is from the debris of the extreme periphery shattered by hovels and barracks that Accrocca's alternative Rome emerges. It is in these marginal areas, in which 'il ponte [...] conduce all'isola / dei prati dove muore la città'⁶⁷ and where 'affiorano le case sui vigneti / oltre il confine della valle',⁶⁸ that the poet lingers with his gaze in order to observe the first signs of the city's expansion, which in a few

⁶⁵ Accrocca, *Portonaccio*, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Armellino, p. 23.

⁶⁷ Accrocca, *Portonaccio*, p. 13.

⁶⁸ Accrocca, *Portonaccio*, p. 25.

decades will go far beyond the bounds traced by the vineyards of the Portonaccio valley.

In a similar way, the journalist and writer Anna Maria Ortese witnesses the beginning of this process of urban decomposition in her postwar accounts from the city. Ortese's Rome is a place in which the magnificent and voluptuous feeling irradiating from the centre, the 'straordinaria euforia,' clashes against signs of modernization emanating from the city's periphery. Thus, in Ortese, the topographical difference between centre and periphery seems slowly to lead towards the dissipation of the image of the 'Eternal City'. In her writings, markers of modernity such as the urban crowd and the growth of suburban areas converge with the magnificent architecture of the city centre, suggesting the need to look at the city as a complex field of opposing tensions, in which urban walks become rituals of chaos that express an unexpected feeling of decadence. Rome is described both as a 'lebbrosario,' and as characterized by an 'estasi sensuale'. These two contrasting tensions contribute towards a redefinition of the city in terms of dialectical coexistence of opposites, a feeling that will also inform, as we will see, Carlo Levi's and Pier Paolo Pasolini's representations of Rome.

In Ortese's article 'Roma. La capitale,' Rome emerges as a place oscillating between 'extraordinary euphoria' and organic decomposition:

La prima sensazione che si prova arrivando a Roma dal Nord con un treno della mattina è quella di una straordinaria euforia. Sul primo momento, questa città non sembra neppure vera. Lo spazio, la luce in cui sono immerse le piazze, le strade, i gialli palazzi umbertini; le prime deliziose rovine, la frescura delle fontane, pini improvvisi che si aprono nel cielo di cobalto, preannunciano una tale libertà fantastica della natura, in cui giacciono storia e costume, da darvi il capogiro.⁶⁹

La paura, come senso recondito di una funzione mancata, di una energia bloccata sul nascere, e dispersa nel costume, è negli occhi dei vecchi, degli anziani, e ha momenti di una strana sincerità. Quasi tutti gli uomini di piazza (...) [h]anno compreso che la città, come una macchina furibonda, ha sbandato, e vola ormai

⁶⁹ Ortese, p. 39.

fuori dalla storia; che lo splendore della città non è sano, non è dovuto ad una crescita organica: è invece il verde splendore di un disfarsi organico.⁷⁰

These quotations offer two pictures of Rome that seem to differ remarkably from each other. This discrepancy is a result of the way in which the writer's gaze moved from a superficial observation of reality to a more profound analysis of things and people. An overwhelming light that strongly contrasts with the feeble light of the 'North' accompanies Ortese's arrival in Rome; the cityscape appears as though characterized by an almost metaphysical light. Ancient streets and squares, the more recent Art nouveau buildings, fountains and trees, all contribute to create a composite picture of Rome in which history seems to metamorphose into nature, at the same time creating a sense of vertigo. This ecstatic snapshot, corresponding to the imagery of a Stendhalian Rome, soon acquires a different perspective through a deeper observation of people. Hence, what Ortese seems to capture in this snapshot is the negative of Rome's picture: the green flash which the negative captures expresses a sense of detachment of the city from itself.

In Ortese's story Rome is captured as it is falling, and this downfall is accompanied by another vivid image suggesting a dynamic of decay, that of a 'disfarsi organico'. For Ortese, the dazzling light of Rome covers up the reality of an organism in decomposition, a process difficult to disclose at first sight, but which the writer is able to reveal through the investigation of the urban crowd. For Ortese, Rome's crowds are an 'onda di carne che riempie le sue strade' in which one could meet 'negri, indiani, file di preti rossi dai volti germanici, gruppi di preti neri, preti in motoretta'.⁷¹ An underworld of underprivileged people like tramps, mutilated individuals and beggars then enriches the composite nature of the crowd:

⁷⁰ Ortese, p. 40.

⁷¹ Ortese, p. 40.

Il carattere sacro della città è visibile ovunque, in ogni punto della sua pelle, come un tatuaggio: l'urlo delle campane, le botteghe sovraccariche d'immagini dorate e di chiese in miniatura per il turista; i poveri, i monchi, le finte madri, l'infanzia autentica, sottratta alla casa, e trasformata in strumento di accattonaggio – che stazionano sui marciapiedi, nei sottopassaggi; le code di turisti davanti alle chiese e ai musei, nelle piazze sublimi, sempre un po' sciatte, se non decorate dai rifiuti, ve lo ricordano continuamente. E su ogni volto, come una luce ch'è possibile solo in certi luoghi stregati, quell'aria d'insensibilità enorme, da lebbrosario, ch'è la caratteristica più sottile della città.⁷²

Again, Ortese's Rome is an oxymoronic entity in which the sacred acquires an impure meaning. The sound of the bells, the ecclesiastic shops and the city's countless churches and priests are accompanied by the image of a multitude of underprivileged people, submerged by history, who fill Rome's underground passages and sidewalks. It is this anonymous crowd that characterizes the city's atmosphere as that of a huge 'lebbrosario'.

This expressionistic description seems to be based on the desire to produce an aesthetic of the impure and of the miserable, by reversing the postcard image of the 'Eternal City'. The description of Rome as a 'lebbrosario' is symptomatic of a course undertaken by the city whose signs are recognizable everywhere, in its centre as much as in its periphery. In the light of Ortese's descriptions, the rotten and putrescent atmospheres of Accrocca's Portonaccio or of Moravia's Ostiense appear to be further symptomatic traces of a general malaise that affects the totality of Rome's urban landscape.

The description of Rome as a corpse in decomposition appears in another article written by Ortese in the immediate postwar period for the journal *Sud* and entitled 'La diligenza della capitale'. Here, the writer describes her visit to a Roman painter – referred to only with the initial A. – in via Margutta, at the time the artistic and bohemian district of the capital.⁷³ Her description of A.'s studio – named 'Reparto

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ For a depiction of the frenzied atmosphere of bohemian's via Margutta in the postwar period see Stephen Gundle's *Death and the Dolce Vita*, in particular pp. 47-57.

agitati' – acts as a sort of prelude to the eccentric city described more than a decade later by Fellini and Flaiano in *La dolce vita*:

il vino correva nei bicchieri, e la stufa alzava cantando le sue lingue rosse, mi son trovata vestita da apache in cima a una scaletta di legno. Una cortina di fumo fluttuava come una tenda di seta grigia. [...] Uomini alti e seri [...] erano mascherati da 'lattante'. [...] Un giovane spagnuolo si era trasformato in 'valigia', mediante una indescrivibile quantità di etichette, dai vivi colori, appuntate con gli spilli sulla giacca e i calzoni.⁷⁴

However, the memory of these frenzied scenes is soon replaced by the description of a different situation. In a later journey to the capital, Ortese seems to notice a gloomier atmosphere, which leads her to ask A.'s wife: 'parlami di Roma [...]. La città m'è persa non so come assente. L'è successo qualcosa? Non ho visto la sua anima'.⁷⁵ The woman's refusal to answer this question then pushes Ortese to try to find an answer by herself. By looking at the melancholic and bitter faces of both A. and C. – the artist's wife – the author realizes that the general sense of hope and rebirth perceived after the end of the war had already been displaced by a feeling of loss, which could be observed in an air of absence that characterized Rome's collective mood. For Ortese, this sense of loss was a consequence of the legacies left by the trauma of the war, which had produced a discrepancy between the expectations that followed the city's liberation and the ability to realize them.

Symptoms of this discrepancy could be witnessed in the state of the arts. As the narrator of Ortese's story puts it 'Arte e poesia, avvolte in coperte portate dalla prigionia, nascondevano il volto tra le ginocchia, agli angoli delle strade'.⁷⁶ The inflation of experiences provoked by the war with its excessive and traumatic stimuli, should lead the artist to change drastically his/her way of looking at reality. Now, so Ortese seems to hint, it is from rags and blankets thrown in street-corners that writers,

⁷⁴ Ortese, p. 378.

⁷⁵ Ortese, p. 380.

⁷⁶ Ortese, p. 381.

painters or filmmakers should draw inspiration, in order to better understand and represent the surrounding world. This attention to the marginal appears to inform A.'s paintings:

Le sue pallide case della periferia, prive di gente, abitate soltanto dalla sofferenza e dallo stento, erano Cristo. Egli dipingeva solamente le case, le case della Capitale, senza gente, senza suoni, senza colore, perché tutto ciò non era che un'apparenza (...) Egli vedeva la capitale com'era adesso, senza la sua anima immortale: vasta, grigia, disabitata. Una verità a cui l'occhio dell'osservatore comune non si sarebbe arreso che fra cinquant'anni.⁷⁷

Following the clues left by the passing of time in the rags and remnants which survived the war time, A.'s gaze appears directed towards the Roman peripheries, characterized by hardship and suffering. His paintings capture the ephemeral mood of the city's modern development through the representation of its buildings. There is no need to paint people, as it is in the grey desert of the suburban city that Rome reverses its Eternal image into an un-eternal and desolated city. In this picture of the city, Ortese finally finds an answer to her initial question: 'what happened to Rome?' The capital's soul, its intrinsic character has to be found in its marginal and peripheral areas. By expanding its limits and by multiplying its urban area the city is only apparently growing, while in truth it is advancing towards a slow decay, whose ultimate signs will be visible to everybody only in the years to come.

Far from being a clear and definite movement, the city's reawakening after the trauma of the war appears however to be a complex process in which the change of paradigm – from the 'Eternal' to the 'Ephemeral' – is characterized by the condensation of different temporalities. The return of the repressed that finds its materialization in this new aesthetic of the marginal is then intermittently disturbed by magnificent visions of the 'Eternal City', as demonstrated by Ortese's depiction of Rome's light. This complex dynamic in which anachronistic images intersect and overlap with the

⁷⁷ Ortese, p. 382.

degraded present also characterizes the work of a writer such as Carlo Levi, who in *Roma fuggitiva* aimed to represent the postwar atmosphere of the Italian capital.⁷⁸

The book, which is composed of a series of essays and articles written by Levi from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, could be considered a miscellany of descriptions of Rome's social, cultural and urban changes in a period of reconstruction and intense modernization for the Italian capital. Although the volume was released almost thirty years after the death of the author, Levi himself had already planned its publication, deciding to collect his printed material on Rome in a specific folder of his archive.

The inspiration for the book's title was offered to Levi by a sonnet by the baroque writer Francisco de Quevedo entitled 'A Roma sepultada en sus ruinas',⁷⁹ in which the poet begins a meditation on the essence of historical time through the observation of Rome's ruins. For Quevedo, Rome's map is a metaphor of death: its walls are cadavers and its ancient monuments symbolize decay rather than glory. However, it is precisely in the very nature of the ruin – which itself symbolizes the signs produced by the fleeting passing of time – that Rome's beauty lies for the Spanish poet:

¡Oh Roma en tu grandeza, en tu hermosura,
huyó lo que era firme y solamente
lo fugitivo permanece y dura!⁸⁰

Quevedo's use of the word *fugitivo* suggests an unconventional understanding of Rome, which highlights its ephemeral features rather than its enduring ones. What Rome's cityscape evokes for the Spanish poet is not the image of the 'Eternal City' in which objects are completely preserved throughout time, but it is the image of a fleeting and fugacious entity in which the ruin allegorically represents the passing of time. It is the

⁷⁸ See Levi, *Roma fuggitiva*.

⁷⁹ See Francesco de Quevedo, 'A Roma sepultada en sus ruinas', in *Selected Poetry of Francisco de Quevedo*, ed. and trans. by Christopher Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 94. In *Roma fuggitiva*, Levi wrongly attributes the sonnet to Luis Gongora, another Spanish baroque poet.

⁸⁰ De Quevedo, p. 94.

time of the now, the fleeting breath of the present that transpires from Rome's ruins, and not the spirit of a timeless history. What Quevedo's use of the term *fugitivo* highlights is a flip, or better, a short-circuit of time, a concept that more than two centuries later became an essential node for the interpretation of urban modernity.

Quevedo's reading of the term fugitive should be compared to Charles Baudelaire's use of the word. In an essay published in 1863, Baudelaire famously described modernity as 'le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable'.⁸¹ This definition, which during the twentieth century produced thousands of pages of commentary and critical analysis, aimed to highlight the intrinsic movement of historical time in the metropolis which Paris had become after the rise of industrial capitalism. The point of view of the artwork had shifted from simply evoking the eternal to focussing also on the ephemeral, and for Baudelaire it was precisely within the ephemeral that the essence of modernity was to be sought.

Baudelaire's *fugitif* and Quevedo's *fugitivo* seem thus to detect a similar dynamic, in which historical time unravels in a dialectical and non-linear way. However, for Quevedo, Baroque Rome is fugitive because it is the fleeting passing of time that decomposes a monument into fragments or ruins, and Rome is a city covered by ruins (the title of the poem is 'Sepultada en sus ruinas'). For Baudelaire, on the other hand, the fugitive element of modern Paris is linked to the break with tradition brought up by the rise of modernity, which drastically reconfigured the presence of the past in the urbanscape of the modern city. In short, Quevedo's Rome is fugitive despite its steadiness, whereas Baudelaire's Paris is fugitive for its mutability.

The ambivalence of these two similar but at the same time opposite interpretations of the same concept seems to find consistency in Carlo Levi's own interpretation of the term. Levi's Rome is *fuggitiva* because it is at the same time a modern and a pre-

⁸¹ Charles Baudelaire, 'La peinture de la vie moderne', in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), II, 683-724, p. 695.

modern city, it is both Quevedo's pre-modern Rome and Baudelaire's modern Paris. It is a city in which past and present, tradition and modernity, cohabit in the same surface, as demonstrated by the survival of the ancient city and its people in contemporary times, and by the uncontrolled growth of the modern city around the historical city centre. As Levi writes:

Il 'fuggitivo' della Roma di questi anni è la storia esterna e apparente della classe dirigente italiana, la fragile immobilità di una restaurazione, il seguirsi apatico degli scandali, delle speculazioni, degli affari, degli arricchimenti, l'apparente trionfo di una borghesia clericale, lo scorrere tra le rovine, come del fiume che commoveva il poeta spagnolo, del fiume scintillante delle automobili sugli antichissimi selciati.⁸²

As Levi's words intimate, the fugitive character of postwar Rome is marked by a clash of temporalities, which unfolds in the overlapping of new and old, and in the sudden reappearing of flashes coming from the past. Levi's Rome is a dissociated city, in which mutating features caused by the advance of modernity and enduring characteristics that survive from antiquity intersect: the ever-lasting weakness of the Italian political class and the continuous series of scandals, the flowing of the river Tiber and the tide of modern cars on the city's ancient streets:

Qualunque discorso tende a diventare rapidamente *archeologico*. Attorno a Roma c'è 'quella cosa immensa e spappolata', che è Roma, e si estende come un corpo ameboide. E dentro, un mondo vivo e prezioso, non ancora fatto, non del tutto esistente.⁸³

It is precisely in this coexistence of opposites that Levi's use of the term 'fugitive' condenses both Quevedo's and Baudelaire's interpretations. Rome is a dialectical and anachronistic entity that refers to both the traditional city contained within the Aurelian walls and to the 'corpo ameboide' that surrounds it.

⁸² Levi, *Roma fuggitiva*, pp. 15-6.

⁸³ Levi, *Roma fuggitiva*, p. 141.

At the same time, the parallel reading between Baudelaire's use of the term 'fugitive' and Levi's 'fuggitivo' proposed here acquires additional power if we think that it was Levi himself who highlighted the importance of Baudelaire's work for his understanding of Rome. In an article published in *La Stampa* in March 1955, Levi drew a comparison between Baudelaire's description of Paris in the 'Tableaux Parisiens' section of *Les fleurs du mal* and his experience of postwar Rome. After describing the experience of walking through Rome's streets – an act of *flânerie* – as an experience of metamorphosing visions, Levi wrote:

Nelle 'pieghe sinuose delle capitali' (se mi è consentita una così barbara traduzione letterale) si può trovare ogni cosa, tutti gli aspetti della grandezza e della miseria, della realtà e della favola, tutti i piani sovrapposti e finiti del tempo, e la gente viva e il suo suono, e i sopravvissuti, e le architetture modellate agli anni e parlanti, e i modi del costume, e le macchine e degli animali, e le espressioni infinite di un mondo infinito.⁸⁴

The sentence that begins the paragraph is a quotation from Baudelaire's poem 'Les petites vieilles', in which the French poet states that it is to the snaky folds – or the remote corners – of old capital cities that one should direct one's gaze in order to study the charming and decrepit refuse of humanity.⁸⁵ In a parallel move, Levi concentrates on the marginal and the peripheral in order to bear witness to Rome's complex and stratified reality: a dynamic of the gaze that Levi resumes in the article 'Il popolo di Roma,' in which he highlights how, in order to find a remnant of life and vitality in postwar Rome, it was necessary to inspect the city's most desperate places and people: 'un altro capitolo di storia si stava scrivendo quando parvero cadere gli ideali [...] e sembrò necessario ricercare un residuo mesto e fragile di quella felicità nei luoghi più atroci di disperazione, nei gerghi e nei gesti della quasi inesistenza'.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Levi, *Roma fuggitiva*, p. 23.

⁸⁵ Charles Baudelaire, 'Les Fleurs du Mal', in *Œuvres Complètes*, I, pp. 7-153 (p. 89): 'Dans les plis sinueux des vieilles capitales, / Où tout, même l'horreur, tourne aux enchantements, / Je guette, obeissant à mes humeurs fatales, / Des êtres singuliers, décrépits et charmants'.

⁸⁶ Levi, *Roma fuggitiva*, p. 15.

1.5. Conclusion: Ragpickers in Rome

We can recognize the first marker of Rome's modernity in this centrifugal movement towards the external, the peripheral and the low and in the subsequent emergence of a different aesthetic to that proposed by hermeticism. Ortese's and Levi's observations of reality through an aesthetic of the miserable and the marginal, as well as Moravia's and Accrocca's attention to the peripheral and the rejected, seem to indicate a precise trajectory in postwar Italian literature, in which Rome emerges as a paradigm for the redefinition of the artist's gaze towards the low. In order to access the collective unconscious of a complex entity such as that of postwar Rome – so Levi, Ortese, Moravia and Accrocca seem to suggest – we must turn our gaze to disregarded and discarded elements, such as its most degraded streets and peripheries.⁸⁷

In this regard, these authors appear to follow the path of Baudelaire's ragpicker, 'whose job is to pick up the day's rubbish in the capital', and who 'collects and catalogues everything that the great city has cast off, everything it has lost, and discarded and broken'.⁸⁸ Baudelaire viewed the figure of the ragpicker as the perfect model for the poet's task in the modern metropolis, in that as the former had to look carefully for the refuse in the city's dirtiest corner, the latter had to investigate the marginal and peripheral aspects of urban life in order to capture its fleeting spirit. These two figures emerge then at the margin of capitalist dominion, as the aim for both is that of plumbing the depths of the street and bringing to light a previously hidden and suppressed reality constituted by debris and refuse, those elements that the industrial

⁸⁷ Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Storia dell'arte e anacronismo delle immagini*, trans. by Stefano Chiodi (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007), in which the author argues that the counter-history we need to oppose to the linear one based on the ideology of the dominant classes has to be based on the ability of the poet to give legibility to the refuse, by selecting and then assembling it together with other significant detritus: 'lo storico-filosofo degli "stracci," dei "rifiuti" dell'osservazione, sa anche che tra la pura dispersione empirica e la pura pretesa sistematica occorre ridare ai rifiuti il loro valore d'uso: "utilizzandoli," ossia restituendoli in un *montaggio* in grado di fornire loro una leggibilità' (p. 116).

⁸⁸ Baudelaire, quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 348.

society had rejected. Thus, the shift of perspective which emerged from the traumas of war and fascism seems to follow the declining trajectory of the artistic gaze best represented by the *flâneur*.

A consequence of this change of perspective was the progressive de-mythologization of the ‘Eternal’ image of Rome. From the postwar period onwards, a counter image reflecting ephemeral and transient features of Rome, typical of urban modernity, collided with the traditional image of a city symbolizing universal values. Hence, Anna Maria Ortese, Elio Filippo Accrocca, Alberto Moravia and Carlo Levi seem to enter the same constellation in which, a century before, writers such as Charles Baudelaire, Victor Hugo and Émile Zola positioned themselves by describing the rise of urban modernity in nineteenth-century Paris.⁸⁹ What all these writers seemed to operate is a re-adjustment of the artistic gaze towards an aesthetic of the street and of the low, after the shock produced by a notable historical trauma: the anti-democratic Second Empire of Napoleon III with the subsequent Haussmanization of Paris in one case, and the totalitarian fascist regime with the subsequent urban ‘sventramenti’ of Rome in the other.⁹⁰

This process appears to reconfigure the image of a city which had been synonymous with a completely different set of values, based on its ancient glorious legacy. The *topos* of the ‘Eternal City’, which for centuries had sustained the Western collective imagination – from the survival of antiquity in the Renaissance, to the Grand Tour image during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to the revival of Rome’s

⁸⁹ Here I am referring to works such as Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), Hugo’s *Les Misérables* (1862) and Zola’s *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873), which depicted Paris’s modernity as a process in which the chthonic elements of the city survived metamorphosing into its modern shapes. For a brief bibliography on Paris’s literary and artistic modernity see Roberto Calasso, *La Folie Baudelaire* (Milan: Adelphi, 2008) and Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ninfa Moderna, saggio sul pannello caduto*, trans. by Aurelio Pino (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2004). For a broader study which combines the economic and urban as well as the cultural and artistic aspects of Paris’s modernity see David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁹⁰ For an analysis of the process of the urban politics of the ‘sventramento’ and the subsequent rise of the ‘borgate’ in Rome’s periphery see Joshua Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

Imperial image during the fascist period – finds in the postwar artistic production a powerful counter-image based on the re-emergence of detritus and sediments coming from a forgotten past. If in previous times the image of Rome was based on the coexistence in the same topography of ruins coming from different eras, after the war, rather than surfacing through the discovery of monumental temples and buildings, the past suddenly flashes up in hidden and fragmented memory traces deposited in rags and shreds amassed in the city's peripheral streets. The mutations set in motion by this shift led to a process of erosion of the map of the 'Eternal City', in which the palimpsestial topography of Rome went through a drastic reconfiguration which influenced and gave life to new aesthetics and histories. It is the attempt to frame all these complex and intersecting dynamics that, towards the end of the 1940s, informed the drafting of Levi's *L'orologio*.

2. Broken Spatialities and Fragmented Temporalities: Postwar Rome in Carlo Levi's *L'orologio*

Siamo davanti alle rovine, che dobbiamo finire di abbattere per riedificare. E la nuova città non può più rifarsi sulla pianta dell'antica.

Carlo Levi

2.1. Fields of Tension in Postwar Rome

As we have seen, the end of the Second World War left in Italy a feeling of bewilderment and hope. As Carlo Levi writes in *L'orologio*, after twenty years of fascism and more than five years of a dramatic war '[i]l corpo dell'Italia [...] tornava a respirare; un sangue nuovo e imprevedibile circolava, in milioni di corpuscoli che trascinavano dappertutto, nei modi più loschi e illeciti, un ossigeno necessario'.¹ In this very fertile scenery – where debris and relics were waiting to be removed and replaced by new roads and buildings, and where almost everybody was expecting a renewal of the political apparatus and its institutions – Rome became the place where one needed to be in order to bear witness to the Italian reconstruction.

In Rome, on 21 June 1945, Ferruccio Parri – one of the former leaders of the Resistance – was elected Prime Minister. His government of national unity brought together, despite their remarkable differences, all the political forces which had emerged in Italy after the official fall of fascism in 1943: Actionists, Communists, Socialists, Liberals and Christian Democrats. This government represented a special moment for the reconstruction of Italian democracy, a moment of suspension in which opposite forces coexisted under the same roof, uniting their strengths with the common aim of paving the way to the country's reconstruction. However, after a few months,

¹ Carlo Levi, *L'orologio* (Turin, Einaudi, 2009), p. 249.

centrifugal tensions started to force apart this fragile coexistence of opposites, and in November 1945 Parri's government entered a deep crisis. After some days of uncertainty, in which political tactics and 'ragioni di partito' overtook national interests, Parri was forced to resign.²

Carlo Levi's *L'orologio* offers a vivid portrait of this critical historical moment. Set in postwar Rome during the days of Parri's fall, the book attempts to plumb the depths of this historical transition, at the same time offering a multifarious and composite depiction of Rome's cityscape. Similarly to Parri's government, Rome is represented by Levi as a field of tensions in which different forces and temporalities cohabit: the Christian and the secular city, classical monuments and the modern metropolis, ancient ruins as well as the more recent ones left by the passage of the war. In Levi's portrait, Rome is a monad in which everything exists in potentiality.³ Thus, the protagonist's question – '[c]ome si sarebbe potuta risolvere quella crisi che era assai più che un cambiamento di ministero, ma il segno della presenza di cose senza comunicazione, di tempi diversi e reciprocamente incomprensibili'⁴ – appears not only as a political question, but also an interrogation of the essence of postwar Rome. In this fleeting moment of expectation, in which the country is suspended in a fragile balance between a haunting past and an uncertain future, Levi captures the image of a fleeting and transient city where everything still seems possible.

Written between 1947 and 1949, and published by Einaudi in 1950, *L'orologio* narrates the story of Carlo, Levi's literary double, during three days in November 1945.

It begins with the day in which Carlo moved from Florence to Rome, having accepted a

² For an analysis of this transition and the role played by the Action Party in the construction of a national identity see David Ward, *Antifascisms: Cultural Politics in Italy, 1943-46. Benedetto Croce and the Liberals, Carlo Levi and the 'Actionists'* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996).

³ See Joseph Farrell, 'Introduction: Carlo Levi and the Reconstruction of Civilization', in *The Voices of Carlo Levi*, ed. by Joseph Farrell (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 11-26: 'For Levi, the mobilisation of forces represented by the Resistance, and their coming to power in the 1945 coalition government headed by Ferruccio Parri meant that Italy was presented with an unprecedented and unrepeatable open moment when everything was thinkable and feasible, when civilization could be reshaped' (p. 18).

⁴ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 66.

post as director of an important newspaper directly linked to the Action Party, and it ends with Carlo's return to Rome after visiting his dying uncle in Naples. At the centre of the story lies an event which will turn out to be crucial for the course of Italy's future: the fall of Ferruccio Parri's government, and the subsequent failure of a project of reconstruction and modernization based on the Resistance as the foundational act of the nation. As Joseph Farrell notes, '[f]or Levi the downfall of Parri's government was a defeat, and a Restoration of a discredited ancien régime'.⁵

The aim of this chapter is twofold: on the one hand it analyses *L'orologio* as a crucial case study for a deeper understanding of Rome's fleeting image in the immediate postwar period. In particular, I will undertake an investigation of how, under the pressure of this historical transition, Rome's palimpsestic structure – characterized by the coexistence of heterogeneous historical layers – started a process of stretching out and of dilation of its unity which would progressively lead to the dismemberment of its urban fabric. While during the experience of Parri's government everything still seemed possible, after its fall Italy appeared to take a precise road, characterized by a dynamic of continuity with the previous historical period.⁶ Although the traces produced by the long wave of the transition will be more visible in Pasolini's and Fellini's representations of Rome, written at least ten years after this event, in *L'orologio* Levi offers the last literary portrayal in which the classical legacy of the traditional city and the fleeting and transient aspects of the modern city appear to cohabit in a symmetrical way.

⁵ Farrell, 'Introduction', p. 19.

⁶ For an historical account of the theory of the *continuità dello stato* between fascist and post-fascist Italy see, among others, Claudio Pavone, *Alle origini della Repubblica, scritti su fascismo, antifascismo e continuità dello stato* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995); Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano* (Roma: Donzelli, 2005); Norberto Bobbio, 'La cultura e il fascismo', in *Fascismo e società italiana*, ed. by Guido Quazza (Turin: Einaudi, 1973), pp. 209-246. See also Carlo Levi, 'La serpe in seno', *Galleria*, 301 (1996), 23-42, in which he opposes Benedetto Croce's idea of fascism as a parenthesis in Italian history by highlighting the survival of fascist elements in postwar Italy.

The chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, I will concentrate on the concept of broken temporality. In my interpretation, Levi's novel is first of all, as the title of the book alludes to, a meditation on time, and in particular on the temporal fracture caused by the interruption of a world that was 'abituato a durare' – that of fascism – and the beginning of a new, 'euphoric' as much as 'uncertain' historical phase. Thus, from the interstices produced by this temporal fracture, a marginal and peripheral world, formerly repressed and populated by beggars, street-vendors, and dusty roads (what, as we have seen, Walter Benjamin once called 'the rags of history'), suddenly came to the surface.

In the second part of the chapter, I will stretch the analysis of the aesthetic of the marginal and broken temporality in relation to Gilles Deleuze's concept of the time-image.⁷ Notwithstanding the fact that Deleuze's concept of the time-image originated within his philosophical analysis of postwar cinema, I argue that traces of the same aesthetic dynamic can be found in Levi's *L'orologio*. The polymorphous, elliptical and dispersive qualities of the time-image seem to characterize Levi's representation of Rome's cityscape, as expressed by the symbol of the watch – which is in fact a broken watch – that gives the title to the book, and by the polymorphic way in which the author describes the mutations of Rome's city space, characterized by the prevalence of elliptical, curvilinear and rhizomatic lines over the vertical, rectilinear and homogenous ones which had defined the fascist city.

Finally, I will focus on the rise of a space of exclusion which emerges in Rome's most remote periphery, that of the 'borgata'. This hyper-marginal location, which for Pasolini became the paradigmatic space for understanding Rome's modernity, finds its first literary depiction in Levi's novel. In light of this, Levi's *L'orologio* seems to provide the most evident example of that aesthetic of the marginal and the peripheral

⁷ See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1989).

that, as we have seen in the previous chapter, constitutes the paradigmatic image of postwar Rome.

2.2. Broken Temporalities: The Broken Watch and the Advent of an Anachronistic Temporality

In *L'orologio*, the concept of time constitutes an essential framework through which we can approach the novel. Levi's book aims to redefine the deepest meaning of this concept from a specific historical moment – the beginning of the cultural and political reconstruction in Italy after the liberation from Nazi-fascism – and from a precise geographical location – Rome. One could understand the novel as a reflection on the necessity of redefining concepts, values and notions in periods of crisis. A thrilling and exciting crisis, as those which follow the end of totalitarian and violent regimes often are, but nonetheless a crisis, if we understand the word as 'a crucial stage or turning point in the course of something'.⁸

The watch of the novel's title represents the narrative thread of the entire book. It appears, in the first pages, as the symbol of the passage of the individual from childhood to adulthood:

Essi [gli orologi] sono quasi sempre un regalo, e un regalo importante, del Padre, o del Nonno, o dello Zio, in una occasione importante, nel momento più decisivo della vita, quello in cui il giovane entra nel mondo, acquista la sua autonomia, si stacca dal passato.⁹

Carlo's watch, 'un bellissimo orologio Omega che non perdeva un secondo',¹⁰ was indeed a gift from his father for his graduation, and from that moment on, he never stopped wearing it. When the story begins, Carlo has just moved from Florence to

⁸ Here I use the definition of 'Crisis' in the *Collins English Dictionary*, 10th edn (New York and London: Harper Collins, 2009).

⁹ Levi, *L'orologio*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁰ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 11.

Rome, having become the editor of a newspaper linked to the Action Party, which was one of the political forces more directly involved in the Resistance movement. During his first night in Rome, Carlo dreams that he loses his watch while visiting an art exhibition in Turin. This dream will prove to be prophetic since, as soon as Carlo wakes up, he breaks the glass of the watch, letting it fall on the floor. The breaking of the watch immediately appears as a key event to Carlo and, as soon as he recovers the object from the floor, he perceives this as a premonition of things to come.

Martino, one of Carlo's colleagues at the editorial office of the newspaper, provides a preliminary interpretation of Carlo's dream:

[e]ssenzialmente l'orologio [...] era l'Unità, o meglio il Selbst, cioè il punto d'incontro dell'io cosciente e dell'io subcosciente, che ormai non sono più tali; il tempo interno, il tempo vero e assoluto; o, in altri termini, era l'Io reale, la profonda natura della persona. Perdere l'orologio voleva dire essere fuori del proprio tempo vero, perdere se stessi.¹¹

For Martino the watch represents the unity between the conscious and the unconscious, and its loss symbolizes the loss of the self, the unravelling of the Ego. However, by defining the watch as the symbol of 'real' time, and by proposing to identify its symbolic meaning with the point of encounter between the Ego and the Super-Ego, Martino's reading appears to leave unquestioned the meaning of time itself. What kind of time does the watch symbolize? Is it the tortuous time internal to the subject – what Bergson calls 'duration'¹² – or is it the quantifiable and chronological time proper of a linear and positivistic notion of history? Carlo, who does not seem particularly convinced by Martino's explanation, had previously differentiated between two distinct notions of time:

pensavo che il tempo dell'orologio è del tutto l'opposto di quel tempo vero che stava dentro e attorno a me. È un tempo senza esitazioni, un tempo matematico,

¹¹ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 62.

¹² See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), in particular pp. 188-223.

continuo moto materiale senza riposo e senza angoscia. Non fluisce, ma scatta in una serie di atti successivi, sempre uguali e monotoni.¹³

Here, the regular rhythm of the watch's ticking, which could be visually depicted by a chronological line, appears completely unable to capture the essence of 'real' time, understood as both the internal time of the individual and the convoluted time of history. For Carlo, time should rather be thought as a flowing entity characterized by irregular and asymmetrical lines: 'quel ritmo irregolare e infinito [...] era il tempo stesso, il tempo vero prima dei tempi'.¹⁴ Thus, the broken watch appears as an object which indicates the severing between a linear and measurable time, and the non-linear time of individual and collective history. In relation to Levi's dichotomic notion of time, Mario Miccinesi has discussed the existence of a severance between mathematical time and the time of the individual, based on duration. In his view:

il pretesto della rottura del vetro dell'orologio assume in questo libro un carattere nettamente simbolico. [...] Per tre giorni il protagonista rimarrà privo del suo orologio, il che sta a simboleggiare la perdita della possibilità di procedere secondo il tempo matematico [...] ed essere costretti ad affidarsi a un tempo soggettivo, tempo come durata, come flusso non misurabile ma appunto per questo assai più vicino all'autentica natura di quel tempo di cui si sostanzia l'essere dell'uomo.¹⁵

In light of Miccinesi's reading, and of Carlo's distinction between two different notions of time, the loss of the watch (in the dream), and its subsequent breaking (in reality), acquire a different meaning from that suggested by Martino, for whom the event represented the disruption of the unity between the time of the self and the 'real' time of history. On the contrary, the broken watch represents the liberation from a superimposed and oppressive notion of time detached from the internal time of the individual, and the advent of a different temporality based on irregularities, anachronisms and returns.

¹³ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 11.

¹⁴ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 10.

¹⁵ Mario Miccinesi, *Invito alla lettura di Carlo Levi* (Milan: Mursia, 1993), p. 77.

This discontinuous and fragmented notion of time is a concept which continuously reverberates in the novel – from its temporal structure, based on déjà-vu and free associations, to the interweaving of temporalities between fascist past and postwar present, to the description of Rome’s cityscape, which is framed through concepts of coexistence of opposites and survival of past traces in the present. In this regard, R. D. Catani has noted how Levi’s prose is characterized by a dialectical movement between *differentiation* and *contemporaneity*, which are two ‘structural processes directed towards the intentional breaking down of conventional narrative sequence’.¹⁶ For Catani, it is through the constant fluctuation between these two poles that Levi’s narrative progresses. This composite aspect of Levi’s prose was also underlined by Italo Calvino, who described the author of *L’orologio* as ‘il testimone della presenza di un altro tempo all’interno del nostro tempo’.¹⁷ In *Tutto il miele è finito* Levi himself noted how ‘la realtà è molteplice; come, in ogni cosa, coesistono tempi diversi e lontanissimi’.¹⁸ Traces of this anachronistic idea of time can also be found in the first pages of *L’orologio*, when the narrator explicitly recognizes that reality is a multi-layered concept, composed by the overlapping of different temporal strata: ‘la realtà è fatta di infiniti strati sovrapposti senza fine’.¹⁹

From a literary point of view, Levi’s notion of time recalls the work of Marcel Proust, who in *In Search of Lost Time* had revolutionized the linear narrative sequence drawing on the anti-chronological concept of involuntary memory.²⁰ A certain

¹⁶ R. D. Catani, ‘Structure and Style as Fundamental Expression: The Works of Carlo Levi and Their Poetic Ideology’, *Italica*, 56 (1979), 213-29 (p. 213).

¹⁷ Italo Calvino, ‘La compresenza dei tempi’, *Galleria*, XVII (1967), 237-40 (p. 238).

¹⁸ Carlo Levi, *Tutto il miele è finito* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), p. 214. The idea of survival of the past and of cohabitation of different layers of past in the present is also raised by Levi in *Paura della libertà* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964): ‘Ogni nostra parola è intrisa di religioni spente, e un volo di uccelli ci commuove perchè in un altro tempo (altro, ma tuttavia non mai finito), era stato un segno. Questo è altrettanto vero su un piano personale e su un piano storico: quello che è stato può tornare, quello che è celato riaffiorare alla coscienza, come riappaiono le spiagge al ritirarsi della marea’ (p. 28).

¹⁹ Levi, *L’orologio*, p. 36.

²⁰ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, 6 vols (New York: Modern Library, 2003). For a discussion of Proust’s philosophy of memory with a particular

‘Proustianism’ appears indeed to characterize the tangled temporality of *L’orologio*, which often advances through the clash between perception and recollection, as expressed in the first pages of the novel: ‘[i]l ricordo infantile era nato in me, senza che me ne accorgessi, mentre ascoltavo il rumore della città’.²¹

However, while the influence of the French writer acts like an underground river in Levi’s narrative,²² he explicitly identifies Laurence Sterne and Stendhal as his two most important literary sources. In a preface to Stendhal’s *Roma, Napoli e Firenze*,²³ Levi highlights how ‘[e]gli ha capito, forse per primo, il valore poetico del casuale, del particolare, dell’interrotto e parziale e istantaneo, nella contemporanea totalità dell’immagine’.²⁴ And, in the introduction to the 1958 Italian translation of Sterne’s book, Levi pays homage to *Tristram Shandy* as the most important source of inspiration for the writing of *L’orologio*. As Levi writes,

mi ero, a suo tempo, ingenuamente stupito che, fra le molte e spesso strane cose che si erano dette dei miei libri, e in particolare dell’*Orologio*, non fosse venuto in mente a nessuno, se non altro per ragioni del tutto estrinseche, di citare lo Sterne. Non comincia forse, il *Tristram Shandy*, con quella frase immortale: “Scusa caro, non hai dimenticato di caricare l’orologio?”.²⁵

The aspect of Sterne’s novel which most deeply influenced Levi’s writing is its alternative notion of narrative time, which lies in the concept of duration rather than linearity:

L’invenzione dell’Io come motivo essenziale e forma della realtà crea una nuova dimensione. Per questo Sterne è un grande maestro di stile, e un precursore del futuro. Si creano nuove forme, e nuovi contenuti: si introducono nelle cose i sentimenti e l’ironia, e il senso dell’infinita mutevolezza della realtà, del suo essere fatta di rapporti inesauribili, della contemporaneità dei tempi. Dove i fili della

emphasis on the concept of duration see Miguel de Beistegui, *Proust as Philosopher: The Art of Memory*, trans. by Dorothee Bonnigal Katz (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

²¹ Levi, *L’orologio*, p. 11.

²² See Gigliola De Donato and Sergio D’Amaro, *Un torinese del sud: Carlo Levi. Una biografia* (Milan: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2005).

²³ This was the preface to the 1960 Italian translation of Stendhal’s book, published by Parenti, Rome. Now in Carlo Levi, *Il coraggio dei miti*, ed. by Gigliola De Donato (Bari: De Donato, 1975), pp. 275-86.

²⁴ Levi, *Il coraggio dei miti*, p. 275.

²⁵ Levi, *Il coraggio dei miti*, p. 265.

matassa si incrociano, le molteplici realtà si sovrappongono in una immagine. [...] È l'invenzione della durata che si sostituisce al tempo, e costringe a una vaga corsa dietro alla sfuggente realtà, e scioglie la struttura e il tempo del romanzo, e i limiti dei personaggi e la loro psicologia.²⁶

Of particular interest, in Levi's quotation, is its focus on Sterne as the creator of a new kind of narrative, open to the mutability of the real, and constituted through the interweaving of different temporalities, converging in the present and leading to the shaping of polymorphous forms and contents. Sterne is, for Levi, the first explorer of a narrative based on a de-structured and multi-layered notion of time, more adherent to the internal time of the individual – time as duration – in which reality appears always fugitive, in motion. As we will see, this interpretation of Sterne's legacy constitutes an important tool for Levi, allowing him to disrupt a linear and conventional narrative, and to unlock a rhizomatic idea of temporality. Levi's assessments of Stendhal and Sterne appear thus to shed light on aspects of his own narrative technique, including the value of detail over generalities, the contemporaneity of different historical times, and the invention of a duration based on a new idea of subjectivity. All of these are extremely important aspects not only for his literary writings but also, more generally, for his multifaceted way of representing time and reality.

If we focus specifically on *L'orologio*, Levi's reading of Sterne helps us shed light on the novel's temporal structure. The English writer had already entered the Italian literary tradition during the nineteenth century, thanks to Ugo Foscolo's translation of the *Sentimental Journey*.²⁷ However, while Foscolo focused mainly on concepts of freedom, love and truth, Levi's interpretation of Sterne's work highlights concepts of heterogeneity, fluidity and coexistence. This choice appears strictly bound to his attempt

²⁶ Levi, *Il coraggio dei miti*, p. 268.

²⁷ In 1813, Ugo Foscolo published an Italian translation of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* with the pseudonym of Didimo Chierico. For more information see Alan B. Howes, 'Foscolo: Sterne's Italian Translator', in *Sterne, The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Alan B. Howes (London: Routledge, 1974), pp. 464-65; Luca Toschi, 'Foscolo lettore di Sterne e altri "Sentimental Travellers"', *Modern Language Notes*, 97 (1982), 19-40.

to capture the interlocutory nature of the postwar period, where the re-emergence of democracy carried with itself the need to move away from the oppressive and rhetorical features of fascist culture.

Levi's interpretation of Sterne's and Stendhal's literary legacies reveals various aspects of *L'orologio*, above all its discontinuous temporality and its dispersive spatiality. In the novel, things and people are always recorded in motion. Rome's sky, for example, is described as 'pieno di curve mutevoli', and it is captured while following 'un suo mobile ritmo'.²⁸ At the same time, the observation of Rome's cityscape by night activates sound perceptions which bring Carlo to recollect images resurfacing from an archaic past: '[t]endevo l'orecchio ad ascoltare, e scrutavo nel buio, sopra i tetti e le altane, in quel mondo pullulante di ombre; e il suono penetrava in me come un'immagine [...] arcana, legata a un altro tempo'.²⁹ The coexistence of different temporalities is represented through the metaphor of the forest, where '[n]on c'è un filo d'erba solo in un prato. Non c'è un albero, ma c'è il bosco, dove tutti gli alberi stanno insieme'.³⁰ Walking through Rome's streets becomes for Carlo an occasion to acknowledge the composite and elliptical – in a word, baroque – form of reality: '[n]on si può fare a meno [...] di fermarsi, e guardare, e lasciarsi riempire di quel senso complesso di cose ferme e di movimento, di cose sporgenti e incavate, di pieni e di vuoti, di vivente e di pressante, di antico e di disteso'.³¹

These descriptions record the effluence and the setting in motion of images and sounds suddenly re-emerging from a near past now perceived as rigid and oppressive. A vital movement seems now to proliferate from the temporal fracture occurred in the postwar period. It is as if the falling of the watch in Carlo's bedroom, which as we saw signals the entry into an irregular and discontinuous temporal realm, has provoked a

²⁸ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 24.

²⁹ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 3.

³⁰ Levi, *L'orologio*, pp. 57-8.

³¹ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 73.

separation – a division, a disjunction – of Rome’s surface. Now, from this interstice, a composite and elliptical reality is resurfacing, at the same time reconfiguring Rome’s image. As Gigliola De Donato also noted: ‘nell’*Orologio*, la realtà si è mossa e arricchita’,³² and this telluric movement appears now to stimulate the interweaving of various heterogeneous threads. Furthermore – and this aspect allows us to place Levi within the same conceptual constellation as that of Pasolini and Fellini – his representation of Rome’s discontinuous and multi-layered topography constitutes an emblematic snapshot which helps us to understand the trajectory of the city’s modernist image.

2.3. Deleuze’s Time-Image: A Roman Modernist Aesthetic?

In his attempt to construct a ‘taxonomy’ of cinematic signs and images, Gilles Deleuze described the aesthetic shift which inaugurated the postwar period in terms of temporal dispersion, structural crisis and a redefinition of subjectivities.³³ As we have seen in the previous chapter, Deleuze defined this paradigmatic shift in terms of a passage from the movement-image – a steady image in which objects have clear contours, subjects have full control of their actions and time is subordinated to movement – to the time-image – an unstable image in which objects are indeterminate, subjects appear floating in space and time is replaced by duration. For Deleuze, this shift was the consequence of the dramatic course of twentieth-century history, which had provoked a drastic change in people’s beliefs and an inflation of experience. According to Deleuze:

The crisis which had shaken the action-image has developed on many factors which only had their full effect after the war, some of which were social, economic, political, moral and others more internal to art and literature and to the cinema in particular. We might mention in no particular order, the war and its

³² Gigliola De Donato, *Saggio su Carlo Levi* (Bari: De Donato, 1974), p. 132.

³³ For a contextualization of Deleuze’s importance in the contexts of film studies and philosophy see D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

consequences, the unsteadiness of the ‘American Dream’ in all its aspects, the new consciousness of minorities, the rise and inflation of images both in the external world and in people’s minds.³⁴

The trauma of the Second World War could indeed be considered the culmination point of a process of redefinition of concepts and values that had already started during the first decades of the twentieth century. The First World War and the colonial ‘adventures’ of European states – though unilateral expressions of the intrinsic violence of Western political power – had also put in contact, more than ever before, people coming from completely different backgrounds and cultures, thus underlining the diversity and heterogeneity embedded in human societies. This process had been accompanied, in the realm of intellectual history, by the challenge to universalism stemming from science (Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity), medicine (Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis), philosophy (Henri Bergson’s studies on memory), literary criticism (Walter Benjamin’s studies on modernity through concepts of allegory and dialectical image), and art history (Aby Warburg’s concept of *pathosformel*).

The revolutionary importance of these discoveries, which questioned the stability of men’s unitary wholeness, was of course destined to bring about radical changes in the realm of the arts too. The first important consequences of these changes could be witnessed in the works of artistic avant-gardes such as Cubism and Futurism, and later on of Surrealism, Dadaism and the Italian Metafisica. Their traces were also notable in the literary works of modernist writers, from James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Italo Svevo to Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and Gertrude Stein, among others. All these artistic

³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1986), p. 206. Walter Benjamin noted a similar dynamic in the aftermath of the First World War: ‘experience has fallen in value, amid a generation which from 1914 to 1918 had to experience some of the most monstrous events in the history of the world. [...] With this tremendous development of technology, a completely new poverty has descended on mankind. And the reverse side of this poverty is the oppressive wealth of ideas that has been spread among people, or rather has swamped them entirely’. Walter Benjamin, ‘Experience and Poverty’, in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927-1934*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and others (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press, 1999), pp. 731-38 (p. 731).

enterprises aimed to register the profound malaise and the discontent that accompanied the rise of twentieth-century modernity. The tragedy of the Second World War brought to a peak the experience of crisis registered by the first literary and artistic avant-gardes, leaving people in a landscape of ruins and relics and producing an unbridgeable fracture with the previous historical period. It is to this sense of desolation and temporal faltering, to this ambivalent feeling of freedom and decadence, proper of a time which represents both the end of an historical era and the beginning of a new one, that the concept of time-image tries to respond.

According to Deleuze, the key characteristics of the new image are: 1. *a dispersive situation* – ‘the image no longer refers to a situation which is globalising or synthetic but rather to one which is dispersive’;³⁵ 2. *deliberately weak links* – ‘the fibre of the universe which prolonged events into one another [...] has broken [...] linkages, connections, or liaisons are deliberately weak. Chance becomes the sole guiding thread’;³⁶ 3. *the voyage form* – ‘the sensory-motor action or situation has been replaced by the stroll, the voyage [...] has become detached from the active and affective structure which supported it’;³⁷ 4. *the consciousness of clichés* – ‘what maintains a set in this new world without totality or linkage [...] are clichés’;³⁸ 5. *the condemnation of the plot* – in which the causal linkage between action and consequence (linear plot) is replaced by the slackening of this relationship that eventually produces a multi-linear and conspiratorial plot.³⁹

In Deleuze’s exposition, the time-image emerges as a philosophical concept which captures the rise of a different cinematic aesthetic that has developed in the aftermath of the Second World War, caused by the existential crisis which had invested human

³⁵ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 207.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 208.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 210.

society since the beginning of the twentieth-century. According to Deleuze ‘it is first of all in [post-war] Italy that the crisis of the action-image took place’.⁴⁰ The reasons for Italy’s ‘avant-gardism’ in the conceptualization of the time-image – which, as already noted, Deleuze discusses within the context of cinema, but which also invested the fields of painting and literature⁴¹ – was that Italy occupied a unique position with respect to other postwar democracies such as Germany on the one hand, and France on the other. Italy, like Germany, had lost the war, but, unlike Germany, it had witnessed the emergence of a movement of resistance against the Nazi-fascist troops in the last years of the war. Moreover, Italian writers, artists and film directors had developed a hyper-allusive and sophisticated language in order to escape the rigid censorship laws of the regime. This process, which in literature materialized in the development of artistic prose and hermeticism, in cinema took the form of the presence of ‘a cinematographic institution which had escaped fascism relatively successfully’,⁴² and which could thus promote the birth of a cinematic postwar course based on a firmer technical and theoretical ground than that of Germany. On the other hand, the Italian situation also differed from the French one, as France, at the very end of the war, was allowed to sit at the table of the winners together with the United States, Great Britain and Russia. These conditions, for Deleuze ‘were not favourable to a renewal of the cinematographic image, which found itself kept within the framework of a traditional action-image, at the service of a properly French “dream”’.⁴³ In light of this, Deleuze underlines how ‘[t]he Italians were therefore able to have an intuitive consciousness of the new image in course of being born’.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Deleuze, *Cinema I*, p. 211.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 206.

⁴² Deleuze, *Cinema I*, p. 211.

⁴³ Deleuze, *Cinema I*, p. 210.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 211.

For Deleuze, the artistic movement which was able to better grasp and represent the new form of reality was cinematic neorealism, and more specifically, films such as Roberto Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta* (1945) and *Germania anno zero* (1948), Vittorio De Sica's *Sciuscià* (1946) and *Ladri di biciclette* (1948), and Federico Fellini's *I vitelloni* (1953). However, instead of undertaking a formalistic analysis of neorealism in light of the time-image, I would rather read the latter as an interesting theoretical tool for understanding the aesthetical shift towards the marginal which occurred in Italy at the end of the Second World War. Given that Deleuze's theory originates from a socio-historical analysis – the advent of a chaotic reality as consequence of twentieth-century technologization of life and the trauma of the two world wars – what I want to argue is that traces of this process can be also found in literary and critical texts as well as in cinematic ones. As we have seen in the previous chapter, there is an intrinsic relationship between the discontinuous and fractured quality of the time-image and Rome's dispersed and fragmentary cityscape, and this correspondence materializes in an 'aesthetics of the marginal and the refuse' which characterizes a number of Roman texts of the postwar period. What this chapter aims to add to the discussion is an analysis of Levi's *L'orologio* which sees the novel as a particularly interesting case for the investigation of possible relations and intersections between the time-image and this 'modernist' Roman aesthetics.

What makes Deleuze's theory particularly relevant for the argument developed here is the existence of a marked contiguity between the time-image and Levi's redefinition of time and space in *L'orologio*. For Deleuze, as a consequence of the temporal shift between the pre-war and the postwar period 'the first things to be compromised [...] are the linkages of situation-action, action-reaction',⁴⁵ which in the new state become dispersive and confused. In a similar way, in Levi's novel, the breaking of temporal

⁴⁵ Deleuze, *Cinema I*, p. 206.

linearity and the subsequent resurgence of an irregular, discontinuous and anachronistic notion of time are signalled, as we saw, by the metaphor of the broken watch, and emerge, for example, in the first scene of the book. Here Carlo is staring out from his bedroom window, located on the via Gregoriana at the top of the Pincio hill. The dark light of the night does not preclude him from getting a feeling of the city's atmosphere:

La notte, a Roma, par di sentire ruggire i leoni. Un mormorio indistinto è il respiro della città, fra le sue cupole nere e i colli lontani, nell'ombra qua e là scintillante; e a tratti un rumore roco di sirene, come se il mare fosse vicino, e dal porto partissero navi per chissà quali orizzonti. E poi quel suono, insieme vago e selvatico, crudele ma non privo di una strana dolcezza, il ruggito dei leoni, nel deserto notturno delle case. Non ho mai capito che cosa producesse quel rumore. Forse invisibili officine, o motori di automobili sulle salite? O forse il suono nasce, più che da un fatto presente, dal fondo profondo della memoria, quando fra il Tevere e i boschi, sulle pendici solitarie, si aggiravano le belve, e le lupe allattavano ancora i fanciulli abbandonati?⁴⁶

This is Carlo's first night in Rome, and as soon as he looks outside the windows of his bedroom, he is struck by a strange noise. Rome's nocturnal cityscape reverberates with a sound which he compares to the roaring of lions, as if Rome were a savannah rather than a modern city. In Carlo's perception, two different temporalities are assembled together – the archaic time of ancient Rome, populated by beasts, and the tense temporalities of the modern city, with its cars, workshops and trams. The perception of Rome's nocturnal murmuring activates in Carlo's mind the rise of a temporality which bifurcates into two directions: one turned forward, to a present time in which Rome appears as a modern city where 'invisibili officine, o motori di automobili sulle salite' produce a vague and almost undistinguishable noise; the other one turned downward, towards an arcane time: 'il suono nasce, più che da un fatto presente, dal fondo profondo della memoria'.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 3. The bifurcation of memory in two directions is the basis of the most important reference for Deleuze's notion of the time-image, which is Bergson's theory of memory. See Keith Ansell Pearson, 'The Reality of the Virtual: Bergson and Deleuze', *Modern Language Notes*, 120.5 (2005), 1112-27: 'Bergson is keen to revise our prevailing idea about how recollections are formed and how

It is from the encounter between an immemorial past to be recalled and a transient present he must bear witness to, that Carlo's recollection originates. What this twofold dynamic seems to underline is the necessity, for him, to enter into contact with an alternative temporal dimension – anti-linear, anachronistic and archaic – re-emerging from the depths of memory, and composed by the intertwining of different mnemonic threads.⁴⁸ In this scene, Rome appears haunted by the re-activation of contrasting forces, sounds and images emerging from the city's unburied past. As such, Carlo's recollection does indeed appear to follow the same rhizomatic trajectory of Deleuze's time-image, where both attempt to react to the loss produced by the postwar temporal fracture, trying to excavate the deepest levels of personal and collective memory. The 'ruggito dei leoni [...] che nasce dal fondo della memoria' perceived by Carlo from his bedroom window responds precisely to the same dimension of time-images, which, as argued by Temenuga Trifonova argues 'are experienced as past [which is] an impersonal rather than an individual past'.⁴⁹

The overlapping between Levi's acoustic image of the lions' roaring and Deleuze's concept of the time-image has a common basis in Bergson's theory of memory. Trifonova highlighted how Deleuze's time-image stems from his re-interpretation of Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, in which the déjà-vu is presented as 'the most authentic expression of the true nature of our mental life: the automatic preservation of the past in the present'.⁵⁰ Deleuze's time-image could be considered the visual representation of

memory operates. In short, his innovation is to suggest that a recollection is created alongside an actual perception: "Either the present leaves no trace in memory, or it is twofold at every moment, its very up-rush being in two jets exactly symmetrical, one of which falls back towards the past whilst the other springs forward towards the future" (p. 1119).

⁴⁸ This multi-linear conception of time in opposition to a linear one is also considered one of Deleuze's most important contributions to cultural and film theories. For a thorough interpretation of Deleuze's concept of time in his work on cinema, see Rodowick, p. 196: 'the series of time is always a rhizome and never a line, a set of mutations and never a dialectical unity, the incommunicable and never an act of communication or information'.

⁴⁹ Temenuga Trifonova, 'A Non-Human Eye: Deleuze on Cinema', *Substance*, 33.2 (2004), 134-52 (p. 134).

⁵⁰ Trifonova, p. 134.

Bergson's *déjà-vu*, as both notions are based on concepts of duration and synchrony, and on the juxtaposition between impersonal and individual experiences of time. As for Levi, various scholars have underlined the important role played by Bergson in his philosophical education.⁵¹ If evidence of a fluid and multi-linear narrative structure can be explained with the influence that Sterne and Stendhal had on the Turinese writer, the theoretical underpinning of that structure has to be sought in his familiarity with Bergson's work. And indeed, similarly to Bergson's *déjà-vu*, Levi's acoustic image of the lions stems, as already observed, from both a conscious and an unconscious experience: the subjective experience of the individual Carlo who consciously observes Rome's cityscape from his bedroom window, and the unconscious and impersonal experience triggered by this observation, which leads Carlo to perceive the resurfacing of archaic sounds and images.

As a testimony of Levi's and Deleuze's shared 'Bergsonism', and of the striking correspondence between the time-image and Levi's recording of the postwar Roman temporality, one could read Trifonova's description of the optical perspective produced by the time-image as a commentary of Carlo's meditation from his bedroom window in front of nocturnal Rome:

In the case of the time-image we perceive purely for the sake of perceiving: we do not respond to the image by acting upon it, rather, we stop at the perception or – what amounts to the same – we are returned to a kind of perception purged of any sensory-motor necessity.⁵²

⁵¹ Though the issue of Levi's cultural education is still an open question, the name of Bergson, together with those of Freud and Jung, is often cited. See Roberto Giammanco, 'Paura della libertà', *Galleria*, 17 (1967), pp. 243-49, in which he noted the importance that Vico, Freud, Jung and Bergson had for the Turinese writer. According to Giovanni Battista Bronzini, Croce and Bergson are 'i due maggiori referenti filosofici di Levi', see Giovanni Battista Bronzini, *Il viaggio antropologico di Carlo Levi* (Bari: Dedalo, 1996), p. 199. See also Hilda Normand Barnard, 'Paura della libertà by Carlo Levi', *Italica*, 24.4 (1947), 358-61, in which she writes that 'implicit in the text are Confucius, Freud, Bergson, Jung, Frazer' (p. 358).

⁵² Trifonova, p. 140.

The description of the time-image as a ‘kind of perception purged of any sensory-motor necessity’ appears to describe perfectly Carlo’s abandonment to the roar of nocturnal Rome. What is Carlo doing while he observes Rome from his bedroom window, if not abandoning himself to ‘perceiv[ing] purely for the sake of perceiving’, withdrawing his subjectivity in favour of a recollection purified by any sensory-motor necessity?⁵³ Thus, in allowing past memory-traces to re-emerge from the depths of memory, Carlo is ‘the character [who] has become a kind of viewer [...] He records rather than reacts. He is prey to a vision, pursued by it or in pursuit of it, rather than being engaged in an action’.⁵⁴ In other words, while he watches Rome’s nocturnal cityscape outside his window, Carlo is not an agent anymore, but a receiver – a pure seer – of time and history.

2.4. Redefinitions of Space in Postwar Rome: A Dispersive Situation

For both Deleuze and Levi, the first traces of the postwar temporal shift – which Deleuze calls ‘the origin of the crisis’⁵⁵ and Levi defines as ‘un mutamento di senso’ – can be viewed within the rapidly mutating space of the city. What in the prewar city seemed stable, fixed and regular, in the postwar city appears unstable, in motion, and irregular. As Deleuze writes, in the period which followed the end of the Second World War ‘the city [...] ceases to be the city above, the upright city, with skyscrapers and low-angle shots, in order to become the recumbent city, the city as horizontal, or at

⁵³ The de-compressive movement of memory which materializes in Carlo’s meditation appears to correspond to both Deleuze’s notion of time-image and Bergson’s theory of memory in *Matter and Memory*. As noticed by Keith Ansell-Pearson in relation to the two French thinkers: ‘[i]t is the energy of memory which allows the living being to free itself from the rhythm of the flow of things and, in this way, to retain in an increasingly higher degree the past in order to influence the future. In other words, the development of the sensory-motor system is the external manifestation of the growing intensity of life which consists in higher tensions of duration’, in Ansell-Pearson, p. 1114.

⁵⁴ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 197.

human height'.⁵⁶ This process of horizontal stretching and of loss of wholeness seems ultimately to have produced an urban-space in which connections between the various parts of the city have broken down, or at least loosened, and in which strolling has replaced action. The city which emerges from this situation is, for Deleuze, a dispersive and animated space, populated by a 'swarming of characters'⁵⁷ floating around with no clear destination.

Similarly, the city that surfaces in Levi's *L'orologio* is characterized by those same elements of mobility, dispersion and disorder that for Deleuze are decisive markers of the shift from the movement-image to the time-image:

Ora, dopo sette anni di stragi e di guai, il vento era caduto; ma le vecchie foglie non potevano tuttavia tornare al loro ramo, e le città parevano boschi spogli, in attesa, sotto un modesto sole, dello sbocciare disordinato di nuovi germogli. [...] Nella selva di Roma erano ormai finiti gli spari e gli hallalí della caccia, e una nuova linfa gonfiava prepotente le cortecce: ma come era tuttavia difficile trovare un riparo! Non tanto per una ragione materiale, la scarsità degli alloggi per la gran folla sopraggiunta, ma piuttosto per un mutamento di senso, per una crisi più profonda, per la sconsecrazione di un mondo, sia pure povero e meschino, ma abituato a durare.⁵⁸

After the dramatic shootings and bombings of war-time, which had brought death and destruction, cities now appear in the process of regeneration. The Italian capital is compared to a forest where copious lymph is suddenly re-flowing into the trees. This metaphor refers to a situation of progressive renovation and hectic mobility which had materialized, within the political sphere, in the government of national unity led by Ferruccio Parri and its project of social and cultural renovation. As Carlo says '[t]utta Italia correva, da un capo all'altro [...] un paese nuovo, un'Italia diversa si apriva davanti a nuovi occhi'.⁵⁹ This re-flowing of vital energies, and the feeling of going through a period of 'sconsecrazione', a 'mutamento di senso' and a 'crisi' suggest the

⁵⁶ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 207.

⁵⁷ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 208.

⁵⁸ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 249.

idea of a sudden redefinition of the concepts of time and space. In light of this critical and fast-developing transition, Carlo's picture of postwar Rome is necessarily a blurred and over exposed one, with shaded contours and fugitive characters standing in front of an obfuscated background.

At the same time, Carlo's metaphor of the forest suggests the need to look at the city from a horizontal perspective rather than from a vertical one, since forests are natural locations which extend in space horizontally as well as vertically. The spatial dynamic of *L'orologio* seems indeed to follow a downward movement very similar to that noticed by de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* and discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Moravia's, Accrocca's and Ortese's representations of Rome. In a similar way, Gigliola De Donato has noted how the structure of Levi's novel follows a pattern of horizontality and openness:

la stessa struttura orizzontale e apertissima del suo procedere narrativo corrisponde essa stessa a un disegno e a una scelta ideologica precisa: la rappresentazione di un sentimento dell'esistere, che si raffigura come il caotico fluire, confuso, ricco e molteplice del reale, privo di *storie determinate* e, in definitiva, privo anche di sviluppo, sempre identico a se stesso in una alternativa perpetua di tensioni contrapposte e di direzioni divergenti.⁶⁰

As De Donato writes, in *L'orologio* reality is captured in its open and horizontal development, and the city presents characteristics of chaotic flow, multifarious perspectives and clashing tensions. These seem to resonate with Deleuze's description of the time-image as a way of looking at reality which 'no longer refers to a situation which is globalising or synthetic, but rather one which is dispersive'.⁶¹

The Rome depicted in *L'orologio* is indeed characterized by concepts of dispersion, chaotic flowing and the cohabitation of temporalities. The via Gregoriana is a 'porto effimero e provvisorio', just as 'effimera' and 'provvisoria' is the bedroom in which

⁶⁰ De Donato, p. 127.

⁶¹ Deleuze, *Cinema I*, p. 207.

Carlo sleeps during his first night in Rome.⁶² The morning after the meditation from his bedroom window, Carlo describes the day as a ‘giornata mutevole’⁶³ and at sunset ‘un’aria piena di colori mutevoli avvolgeva le case’.⁶⁴ He then depicts Rome’s sky as ‘ricco, denso, popoloso, gremito di nubi barocche, pieno di curve mutevoli [...] spaziando qua e là, seguendo bizzarro [...] un suo mobile ritmo’.⁶⁵ At the same time, Rome’s streets, arches, and small squares are described as ‘arcani rapporti di spazi, come un linguaggio sensibile alla contemporaneità dei tempi, in un passato armoniosamente presente’.⁶⁶ The atmosphere of dispersive transience underlined by these descriptions emerges from the observation of elements of reality which seem to float around the city’s space following a disordered rhythm. This sense of mutability is enhanced by the fact that these snapshots are taken ‘in motion’, while Carlo is walking about Rome’s central areas.

Levi’s Rome is an unstable and fleeting entity, and these characteristics materialize in both the structure and content of *L’orologio*, in which Rome appears to be characterized by a dialectical process of tension and the release of tension, folding and unfolding, contraction and dilation. The overlapping of volatile images such as changeable curves and clouds, the flowing of an urban rhythm in constant flux, and the coexistence of past and present features offer a series of snapshots of the city in which a process of continuous dilation of spaces and of stretching of borders becomes visible.⁶⁷ In this multifarious and intricate scenery, characterized by ‘fluidity of matter’ and ‘elasticity of bodies’,⁶⁸ Rome’s cityscape comes to light as an aggregate of compressive forces which oppose each other. In this patchy scenery, Carlo ‘the pure seer’ is also the

⁶² Levi, *L’orologio*, pp. 3-4.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 24.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 140.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 24.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 140.

⁶⁷ See Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. by Tom Conley (London: Athlone Press, 1993); here the Baroque, rather than as a style, is understood as an ‘operative function’ which endlessly ‘reproduces folds’ (p. 3).

⁶⁸ Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 4.

cryptographer ‘who can peer into the crannies of matter and read into the folds of the soul’ of Rome.⁶⁹ Or, in de Certeau’s terms, he is the prototype of the practitioner of everyday life in the city, what remains of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*.

Spatial configuration in *L’orologio* continuously oscillates between the poles of stasis and movement. Meditations and recollections, which are usually bound to situations of inactivity, are indeed followed by snapshots of street-life which are usually taken in motion (for example, during Carlo’s walks, or during his car journeys inside and outside the city). A walk through central Rome, near the Spanish steps, becomes for him an occasion to observe that:

In questa incessante e chiassosa circolazione si infilava la gente a piedi, e scorreva ai lati, in disordine. C’era un angolo morto, a sinistra appena entrati, dove nessuno passava, e sostavano, come detriti leggeri spinti ai bordi di una corrente, mendicanti e donne cariche di fagotti. Qui mi trattenni un momento, a guardare le case dorate, disposte irregolarmente, con una fantasia senza regola. [...] Non si può fare a meno, per quanto si possa avere fretta [...] di fermarsi, e guardare, e lasciarsi riempire di quel senso complesso di cose ferme e di movimento, di cose sporgenti e incavate, di pieni e di vuoti, di luci e d’ombre, di familiare e di esotico, di vivente e pressante e di antico e disteso.⁷⁰

In this image, the space of Rome appears as a complex and multi-layered surface where contrasting forces such as the internal and the external, the protruding and the indented, the stable and the unstable, lose any geometrical distinction and end up coexisting with each other without normalizing themselves. At the same time, passers-by are captured while floating around like detritus pushed along the banks of a river. In this composite picture, the street emerges as a dialectical and lively place where all the energies of this historical transition are channelled.⁷¹ Carlo appears then as an explorer of the city, and

⁶⁹ Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Levi, *L’orologio*, pp. 72-3.

⁷¹ A similar dynamic is detected by Georges Didi-Huberman in relation to Walter Benjamin’s attention to the street: ‘Benjamin, quando rivolge lo sguardo alla città, alla strada, non delinea una topografia, in senso stretto, architettonica, ma un’“altra topografia”, com’egli dice, interamente pensata nella sua dimensione antropologica, se non “antropocentrica”. La strada non è semplicemente uno spazio aperto tra le case per unire due punti della città. La strada può essere “magia della soglia”, “viscere”, “grembo di prostituta”. L’architettura della città vuole essere interrogata come “testimonianza [...] della mitologia latente”, dove s’individuano l’impensato, la memoria, la lunga durata di una cultura’. See Georges Didi-

his gaze focuses on the point of fusion of things, the point in which they appear to take shape.

In the novel, the materialization of the street as a space in which things and people appear to reach their point of fusion demonstrates the capital importance that this place has for Carlo. The streets of Rome are indeed the locations in which he can lose himself in the pure optical observation of a deranged reality. His walks around the city never follow a rectilinear movement. Although always directed towards a definite destination point, they appear to follow the rhythm of a de-structured dance rather than a disciplined walk: 'seguivo la corrente, lasciandomi portare dal movimento, in quella agitazione brulicante, giù per la strada in discesa'.⁷² While strolling around Rome, Carlo never attempts to gain full control of the environment which surrounds him, he rather abandons himself to the city's swarming vibrations. Carlo's movements around the city appear like symptoms of that 'voyage form', based on the slackening of sensory-motor schema, which for Deleuze constitutes an essential aspect of the postwar image.

A similarly dynamic weakening of linkages seems to stem from Carlo's description of the characters who populate Rome's streets, from his portrayals of the urban crowd to those of beggars and street vendors. His portrayal of street-scenes highlights the presence of a pulsing and extroverted vital force within the body of the city. In these scenes, the Roman crowd is described as a composite and animated humanity:

Nel centro della piazza era raccolta una folla allegra: ne udivo le risate, e le grida gaie dei ragazzi [...] uomini, donne, vecchi, bambini, operai in abito da lavoro, venditrici di sigarette, raccoglitori di mozziconi, mendicanti, giovanotti con i capelli lucidi, ragazze con le pellicette corte, vecchie sdentate, soldati, impiegati [...] e tutti i visi erano aperti, senza segreti, abbandonati ad un incanto felice. E anch'io, in mezzo a quel gruppo di uomini sconosciuti, mi sentivo invadere da un senso improvviso di gioia.⁷³

Huberman, *Ninfa moderna: saggio sul pannello caduto*, trans. by Aurelio Pino (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2004), p. 45.

⁷² Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 72.

⁷³ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 141.

This description highlights concepts of openness, happiness and abandonment to the city's flowing rhythm. Carlo's gaze moves from the observation of the crowd as a whole to that of the individuals composing it, appearing thus to move in conic sections towards details and particularities. In light of this, it seems that Carlo's observations, as well as his movements around the city, follow an elliptical pattern, and that his point of view of the city is never from above but always horizontal to the scene he is observing.

If we follow the elliptical movement of Carlo's gaze from the general to the particular, he seems to direct the attention of the reader toward the character of Teresa, the 'venditrice di tabacco'.⁷⁴ Before the war, Teresa was a young woman married to a Fascist lawyer who, after the fall of fascism, left her and ran away with another woman to Milan. Her previous life, the easy and yet irksome life of a middle-class wife, had thus been swept away during the war-time, turning her existence into a hard fight for survival. At the same time though, this dramatic event had also liberated her from the chains of oppression and social constraint super-imposed on her life by the conventional role that a patriarchal society such as fascist Italy assigned to a woman. In Carlo's description, her figure seems to emanate the ambivalent vibrations of this historical transition: the sense of lightness arising from the end of an oppressive and dramatic period, and the preoccupation with a future which seems surrounded by a veil of uncertainty. In Teresa's eyes the sense of bewilderment caused by the move away from the fascist past – 'tempi del passato della noiosa vita di ogni giorno' – seems indeed to condense with the vibrant confusion of the present:

Tutte le leggi erano cadute, tutti i legami e i ritegni, e la coperta di piombo delle mortali abitudini quotidiane. Per la prima volta, finalmente, la signora Teresa si sentiva un essere vivente, vivente e miserabile, lanciata nel gran mondo, in quel turbine di forze oscure e meravigliose che avvolgono le cose e le muovono e le trascinano. Non era più addormentata, sulla riva, ma dentro il fiume, nel pieno

⁷⁴ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 28.

delle sue acque e dei suoi vortici, ben sveglia, e rabbrivida di felicità nei grandi occhi brillanti.⁷⁵

Here, Carlo sheds light again on the temporal fracture created by the end of fascism, describing the present time as a whirling and chaotic river. In this new, tumultuous situation, all the rigid laws that characterized the previous historical period seem to have disappeared. Teresa's condition appears to express that weakening of linkages which for Deleuze constitutes the second characteristic of the time-image. She appears as that 'fibre of the universe which prolonged events into one another' and which at some point broke, thus leading to a situation in which 'reality is lacunary and dispersive' and '[l]inkages, connections, or liaisons are deliberately weak'.⁷⁶ As Carlo says, in Teresa's life condition, all the laws, links and restraints which had moulded her previous life have suddenly broken. Thus, sat at a corner of a busy road in front of a table full of cigarettes to sell, Teresa appears precisely as the allegory of the contrasting tensions of postwar Rome.

Critical interpretations of Levi's *L'orologio* have often framed his representation of Rome through concepts of sickness and malaise. For example, Paolo Mauri has written that 'Per Levi tutto a Roma appare incredibile e devastato dalla pigrizia, dal disordine, dalla furbizia insopportabile di chi nulla vuole intraprendere',⁷⁷ while Giovanni De Luna stated that 'La Roma descritta ne *L'orologio* è una città malata; la guerra appena finita ne ha provocato come un corrompimento, infettandone le strade e le piazze, avvelendone l'aria, assimilandola a un essere mostruoso, ferino, con un'identità animalesca indefinita e perciò più inquietante'.⁷⁸ However, the image of Rome that emerges from the analysis proposed here appears to challenge the definition of Rome as

⁷⁵ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 28.

⁷⁶ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 207.

⁷⁷ Paolo Mauri, 'Carlo Levi e Roma', in *The Voices of Carlo Levi*, ed. by Farrell, pp. 41-8 (p. 44).

⁷⁸ Giovanni De Luna, 'L'orologio di Carlo Levi e l'Italia del dopoguerra', in *Carlo Levi, gli italiani e la paura della libertà*, ed. by David Ward (Milan: La Nuova Italia, 1992), pp. ix-xxiv (p. xi).

a 'città malata'. While undoubtedly Levi signals the existence of a sinister and almost conspiratorial dynamic within the mechanism of Italian political life – something of extreme importance which materializes in the resignation of Ferruccio Parri and in the dramatic theory of the 'continuità dello stato' – these events do not constitute the most essential aspect of Levi's representation of Rome. Rather, the political city, which Levi names 'il Palazzo',⁷⁹ appears as an entity completely detached from the multi-layered and magmatic city which pulses outside its walls. It is something which Carlo describes as a world of its own, closed and separated from the city's real life: 'ero caduto in uno stagno di interessi e di intrighi di cui mi sarebbe sempre sfuggita la ragione, in un mondo chiuso e impenetrabile'.⁸⁰ In this respect, David Ward has rightly talked about a severance between Levi's portrayal of the 'Roman' political classes and his depiction of the city of Rome:

Levi portrays Roman political society in the harshest of terms. On the other hand, the city itself, especially its popular quarters, is portrayed as a marvellous source of energy, creativity and regeneration. The major contrast on which the whole novel is structured is between the vitality of the city streets as people attempted to construct a new life for themselves out of the ruins of the old world, and the sedimented, codified regime of political society, intent on re-establishing that old world.⁸¹

Thus, as Ward argues, in *L'orologio* Levi appears more eager to denounce the Italian political class for not listening to the roaring of the lions, the hyper-vital murmurs of Rome's multi-faceted humanity, than to represent Rome as a 'sick city'.

⁷⁹ The definition of the entangled web of Italian political power as 'Il Palazzo' is usually ascribed to Pasolini. However, Carlo Levi already uses it in *L'orologio*: 'del resto questi barbari [the politicians] non avevano fatto grandi rovine: le avevano soltanto, timidamente, minacciate. Il Palazzo era rimasto quello che era sempre stato, fin dai giorni ormai lontani della sua costruzione' (p. 143).

⁸⁰ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 41.

⁸¹ Ward, *Antifascisms*, p. 181.

2.5. Peripheral Moves: Towards a Fragmented Topography

The fifth chapter of *L'orologio* is dedicated to the description of Garbatella, a 'borgata' built during the 1920s and 1930s and located to the South of the historical city centre of Rome. With this description Carlo captures the *ur-form* of that process of modernization which in the following decades will transfigure once and for all the topography of the traditional city, leading to the crystallization of the historical centre on the one hand, and to the uncontrolled growth of the periphery on the other. It is in *L'orologio* that the Roman 'borgata' is described for the first time in a literary text as such a vivid reality.

At the beginning of the chapter Carlo is convinced by his friend Marco⁸² to accompany him to the Garbatella in order to look for Fanny, a girl with whom Marco has fallen in love. After leaving central Rome in Marco's jeep, they drive through the expanded and discontinuous urbanscape of Rome, passing by new peripheries and fragments of countryside. Garbatella makes its appearance as a space completely detached from the rest of the city: '[u]na collinetta, una gobba del terreno, coperta di case, appariva in distanza. La strada portava giù. Era la Garbatella'.⁸³ Already from its first description, the Garbatella appears as a dystopic other-space located outside the limits of the old city. According to Carlo:

c'erano [...] grossi e alti palazzi pretenziosi; dipinti di giallo, e costruiti in quello stile indefinibile che univa un po' di barocco e un po' di 'razionale', mescolava colonne e balconi fatti a scatola, finestrelle orizzontali e pinnacoli borrominiani; l'architettura che si usava chiamare imperiale, e che è, piuttosto, coloniale, fatta, con boria e disprezzo, per un popolo considerato inferiore, a cui si vuol dare, perché ci viva dentro tutte le sue povere ore, nel modo più scomodo e doloroso, case ornate dai segni esteriori della potenza e della grandezza. Costruite nel centro della città, nei vecchi quartieri pieni di movimento, questa specie di case vengono presto, in parte, assorbite dalla vita circostante [...] Alla periferia, nei recenti sobborghi, esse si impongono, e pesano, danno un senso di falso al costume [...] Ma quando esse sorgono assurde in mezzo alla campagna deserta, tra le sterpaglie, i mucchi di detriti [...] esse appaiono mostruose e sudicie.⁸⁴

⁸² Marco is in fact the author Mario Soldati.

⁸³ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 111.

⁸⁴ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 113.

Here, the stylistic description of the Garbatella as ‘coloniale’ rather than ‘imperiale’, signals people’s subordination to a condition of marginality, both spatial and social, imposed by the political power. The process of moving the popular classes outside the limits of the city – a process which had started during the 1910s and which had strongly intensified during the Fascist *ventennio* with the creation of the official ‘borgate’ – seems to be symptomatic not only of the will to remove Rome’s inhabitants from the centre to the outskirts of the city, but also of the complete disinterest of the Italian government towards the living situation of these citizens. The cold anonymity of these buildings, named Lotto 40, 41, 42 and so forth; the impossibility for their inhabitants to access any services or to move around the city, as a consequence of their isolation; and the lack of any hygienic conditions in which these people live, are all factors which suggest their total abandonment on the part of the Italian institutions.

As soon as Marco and Carlo enter Lotto 42 they are ‘assailed’ by a request made by local people: ‘guardate dove viviamo!’.⁸⁵ This almost desperate cry is the result of their desire for someone coming from the ‘external’ world to bear witness to the dramatic situation in which they live. The courtyard of the Lotto is a ‘terreno [...] tutto coperto da uno strato, spesso forse qualche metro, di rifiuti, di sterco, diventato solido e grigio’,⁸⁶ whereas the houses where people live are described as ‘stanze nude, con poche e vecchie suppellettili, piene di bambini [...] sporche, disordinate, ingombre di stracci e di rimasugli’.⁸⁷ In this scenery of extreme poverty and privation of basic needs, Carlo and Marco encounter two women, Rosa la Giudia and the Viterbese, who embody the paradigmatic figures of the abject condition of life in a ‘borgata’. Rosa la Giudia is a Jewish woman whose life was turned upside down after the Nazi troops deported her

⁸⁵ Levi, *L’orologio*, p. 116.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 117.

husband, daughter and son from their house in the Jewish Ghetto of Rome to the concentration camps, where they eventually died. Now, Rosa has decided to spend her time praying in the temple while waiting for her death to come: '[a]spettava la morte, che la liberasse. Che le restava da fare, ora che i suoi non c'erano più?'⁸⁸ Similar to Rosa, the Viterbese is also a victim of the war. While trying to escape from the German troops, her husband had thrown himself out of a window breaking his legs, which had then had to be amputated. Now, neither herself nor her husband work anymore, despite the fact that they have five children to take care of. The Viterbese's family is in fact forced to live in a tiny room, sleeping in the same bed and relying on the nearby parish for food: '[a]ndavano a prendere la minestra e il pane, tutti i giorni, alla parrocchia: con questo vivevano'.⁸⁹ Her face looks like the picture of hopelessness, of someone who has stopped believing in the possibility of a better future: '[g]li occhi, li aveva insieme lucidi e spenti: ci guardò, quando entrammo, senza altra espressione se non quella di una infinita stanchezza'.⁹⁰

Rosa and the Viterbese, together with Teresa, are the most representative female figures of the entire novel, and provide us with a portrait of the social marginality common to many people during the immediate post-war period. Through the individual experiences of these three women, Levi's novel seems to re-inscribe in its text the collective trauma of the war. In this respect, Nancy Harrowitz has talked of *L'orologio* as a text which gives voice to issues of memory and post-occupation trauma, during the difficult period which followed the liberation.⁹¹ However, the condition of marginality which these three women share appears asymmetrical: while Teresa's eyes express ambivalent feelings of fear and vital energy, Rosa and the Viterbese are apathetic

⁸⁸ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 118.

⁸⁹ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 120.

⁹⁰ Levi, *L'orologio*, p. 119.

⁹¹ See Nancy Harrowitz, 'Carlo Levi: Watching the Future of Holocaust Representation', in *The Voices of Carlo Levi*, ed. by Farrell, pp. 147-58.

figures who transmit pure annihilation. In their faces there is nothing that expresses a sense of liberation from the dramatic years of the war and of the Fascist *ventennio*. They live in a sort of parallel temporal dimension of sorrow and privation which traces a line of continuity between the pre-war and the postwar period. In this sense they inhabit another space – on the other side of the fracture produced by the fall of Carlo’s watch – and are representatives of an undifferentiated and circular temporal dimension.

This lack of hope is a feeling that seems to have something to do also with the women’s geographical displacement. Rosa and the Viterbese inhabit a ‘space of exception’, that of the ‘borgata’, which was constructed specifically to erase the most marginal social groups from the city-centre.⁹² While this topic will be treated in more depth in the following chapter in regard to Pier Paolo Pasolini’s representation of Rome, here it seems important to mark how the ‘borgata’, this Fascist device created to contain a sector of population which was considered to be surplus to requirements, became, immediately after the liberation, the paradigmatic place from which to witness the trajectory of Rome’s modernity.

Carlo’s description suggests a reading of the city which not only opposes centre to periphery, but also the periphery to the ‘borgata’. His description could indeed be considered a snapshot of an ‘exceptional’ space situated beyond the limits of the city. In Carlo’s description, Garbatella does not participate in the dispersive cityscape of postwar Rome but in another, almost infernal space, located at the threshold of what he considers to be Rome’s city-limits. In a city characterized by the cohabitation of different urban blocs – central, semi-peripheral and peripheral ones, finished and unfinished ones, destroyed, semi-destroyed and undamaged ones – Garbatella represents a sort of cancerous metastasis. The severance between the city-centre and the periphery

⁹² Here I am referring to Giorgio Agamben’s discussion of the ‘state of exception’ in *Homo sacer, il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), and Giorgio Agamben, *Stato di eccezione* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003). The interpretation of the borgata as a ‘space of exception’ will be further investigated in fifth chapter of this thesis in relation to Pier Paolo Pasolini’s work.

appears here problematized by an additional external layer of the city – that of the ‘borgata’ – which opens up a new, ‘exceptional’ space within Rome which breaches the unitary wholeness of the traditional city.

Although Garbatella will progressively lose not only its extra-peripheral but also its peripheral status, becoming an integral part of the city’s central area during the 1980s, Carlo’s description of the borgata precociously detects a symptom which will mark Rome’s modernization in the following decades which will be characterized by the sudden sprouting of huge areas completely detached from the map of the traditional city. This disturbing dynamic, which will be masterfully captured by many films and novels set in Rome during the 1950s and 1960s and documented by urbanists like Italo Insolera and Leonardo Benevolo, will constitute an important focus in the following chapters.

What it seems important to highlight here, is Carlo Levi’s capacity to detect the early traces of a paradigm of modernization which will transform the topography of the Italian capital for the rest of the twentieth century. While Levi’s representation of central Rome emphasized concepts of dilation and dispersion, as well as the reconfiguration of spatial-temporal linkages, his depiction of the ‘borgata’ captures the opening of a deep fracture within the surface of Rome. Thus, the process of stretching out and of tensile dilation recorded by Levi’s *L’orologio* appears as the starting point of a centrifugal urban and cultural movement which, within the following three decades, will lead to the dismemberment of the map of Rome, until its complete explosion, emblematically registered by Pasolini in *Petrolio*.

Section II. The Dilating City

*Il centro s'apre, tutto cade a terra, a terra, a terra.
[...] La macchina da presa viene rapidamente
capovoltando così la sensazione della caduta.*

Laszlo Moholy-Nagy

From the immediate post-war period (1945-48) to the end of the 1950s Italy went through a period of reconstruction which drastically changed the socio-economic and cultural structure of Italian society. In 1951 Italy was still characterized by a partially pre-capitalist economic structure, mainly based on agricultural activities, and its social formation reflected this structure. The Italian countryside and the suburban areas of its biggest cities were characterized by the presence of vast sectors of the population – the so-called ‘civiltà contadina’ – which were living outside the capitalist superstructure. However, by the end of the 1950s the situation had changed remarkably. Industry had supplanted agriculture as the main activity, the ‘civiltà contadina’ was progressively disappearing as a consequence of urbanization, and cities like Rome, Milan, Turin and Genoa were open construction sites in constant expansion. In short, Italy was on its way towards that complex process that historians dubbed the ‘Italian economic boom’ (1958-1963).¹

With respect to Rome, this new phase corresponded to a period of quick and drastic changes which reflected and in some aspects radicalized the national dynamic. Such changes were mainly the consequence of a huge demographic expansion caused by consistent waves of immigrants who kept moving to the Italian capital. While in 1951 Rome’s inhabitants numbered 1.651.700, in 1961 the city counted 2.188.160

¹ See Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 210-53.

inhabitants: in just ten years the city's population grew by 25%.² Such numbers should be integrated with an analysis of the areas into which Rome's newcomers moved. While the city's central areas witnessed a decrease in terms of population of about 30%, from 424.200 to 278.610 citizens, its most external and peripheral areas, which included both the old fascist 'borgate' (whether official or illegal ones), and new areas of construction such as the Tiburtino 2 or the Quadraro, kept expanding far beyond the limits of the ancient city represented by the Aurelian walls.³ These are the years of the 'grande edilizia pubblica', best represented by the INA-Casa plan, a housing project promoted by the Christian Democrat minister Fanfani in 1949 which aimed to handle the chronic housing crisis that was particularly acute in Rome. As Vittorio Vidotto synthesizes, '[p]er tutti gli anni Cinquanta e per i primi anni Sessanta l'edilizia a Roma è in costante ascesa'.⁴ At the same time, what this 'febbre edilizia' triggered was also the spreading of corruption, through the illegal and speculative initiatives of private constructors. In order to analyse these practices and eventually denounce them, between the end of 1955 and the beginning of 1956 Manlio Cancogni carried out an investigation for the weekly liberal magazine *L'Espresso*. In his reportage, entitled 'Capitale corrotta = Nazione infetta', the journalist unveiled the dishonest system – based on bribes, and personal favours – which linked Rome's political administrators to the city's building contractors.⁵ According to Cancogni, such speculative initiatives worsened rather than improving the housing crisis, as a consequence of the sudden increase of land prices, which obliged the lower classes to live in shacks and barracks, and kept industrial activities (and thus jobs) far away from Rome.

² ISTAT statistics of Rome's demographical history can be found at Anon., 'Censimenti popolazione Roma 1871-2011', *Tuttitalia.it*, online: <<http://www.tuttitalia.it/lazio/33-roma/statistiche/censimenti-popolazione>> [accessed 31 July 2013].

³ Vittorio Vidotto, *Roma contemporanea* (Bari: Laterza, 2006), p. 105.

⁴ Vidotto, p. 281.

⁵ Manlio Cancogni, 'Capitale corrotta = Nazione infetta', *L'Espresso*, 11 December 1955, pp- 9-15.

Interpreting this information within the framework proposed in this thesis, we could argue that during the 1950s Rome went through a period of radical urban, social, demographic and architectural modernization which led to an equally radical mutation of its image. In short, Rome kept dilating and expanding in a partially uncontrolled and random way which made it hard for the writer, the artist or the film director to capture the city's rapidly mutating image. In this second section of the thesis I will argue that such changes – the progressive urbanization of the 'civiltà contadina', its huge demographic growth, the housing crisis and the uncontrolled urban and suburban expansion of the city– contributed to the formation of a new paradigm shift of Rome's imagery. This change, which follows the dynamic of expansion and dilation of Rome's borders triggered a process of progressive distancing between the image of the postwar city – the city of the marginal and of refuse – and the modernizing city of the economic boom, which I propose to describe as the 'dilating city'. While for Levi and the other authors analysed in the previous chapters it seemed still possible to capture the city as a whole – a ruinous, shattered and fragmented whole but nonetheless a unitary entity – 1950s Rome registers the progressive disjunction of that whole.

In order to understand better this process of detachment, in the first chapter of this section I will focus on the development of a 'Roman' discourse on modernity, which, I argue, takes a particularly interesting shape in the pages of the journal *Nuovi argomenti* during the 1950s. The birth of *Nuovi argomenti*, initially edited by Alberto Moravia and Alberto Carocci, coincided with the formation and the cultural hegemony of the Roman intelligentsia. I will thus start my discussion of Rome's 1950s modernity by looking at the ways in which the discourse on modernity, and in particular the problematic relationship between past and present, developed in the pages of this 'Roman' journal. Then, in the second and the third chapters of this section, I will discuss Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1959) and Pier Paolo Pasolini's Roman writings as crucial case

studies for the understanding of Rome's dilating process. In my reading, Fellini and Pasolini engage in very different yet complementary ways with the urban body of a modernizing Rome, allowing us to visualize a vast archive of images which deconstruct any stereotypical idea of the capital, while at the same time opening up new ways of looking at the city.

3. Temporal Disruptions: *Nuovi argomenti* and the Discourse of Italian Modernity

3.1. *Nuovi argomenti* and the Formation of a Roman Intellectual Circle

Historians of Republican Italy generally consider the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s as an important moment for an understanding of Italy's shift from the reconstruction period to the economic miracle. In his history of contemporary Italy, Paul Ginsborg subdivides the period which stretches from the end of the Second World War to the 1960s into three phases: he defines the three years between 1945 and 1948 as 'The Post-war Settlement'; he then frames the decade 1948-58 in terms of social and political re-ordering of the country; and, finally, he considers the year 1958 as the beginning of a five-year period of rapid changes in which 'an extraordinary process of transformation [...] was taking place in the everyday life of the Italians – in their culture, family life, leisure-time activities, consumption habits, even the language they spoke and their sexual mores'.¹ Similarly, in his *Storia del miracolo italiano*, Guido Crainz singled out 1958 as 'un anno di confine',² considering it the watershed between the postwar reconstruction years and the beginning of a period of great transformation of Italian society, in which the country drastically reconfigured its urban, industrial and social geographies.

The framing of this historical moment in terms of a temporal fracture can also be recognized in a series of critical and literary texts which were published towards the end of the 1950s. In *Dieci inverni (1947-1957)*, Franco Fortini describes the decade 1947-57

¹ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 239.

² Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano: cultura, identità, trasformazioni fra anni cinquanta e anni sessanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2005), p. 57.

as a long and austere period in which the transformations which Italy was undergoing brought about the progressive disappearance of the sense of hope and optimism which had characterized the immediate postwar period. As he writes:

Rimanevo a guardare come il metallo si arroventava. Dalla finestra, vedevo tetti, cortili, fumi, di una Milano vecchia, semidistrutta; poi, nuova. Erano inverni profondi, faticosi. Le rovine che avevamo intorno come l'allegoria di un riscatto possibile sparivano per dar luogo ad una città opulenta e meschina. Spariva l'Italia popolare e orgogliosa delle sue piaghe che un tempo aveva scoperto e amato se stessa fra resistenza e dopoguerra; o, se dal sud ne venivano le voci e le grida, con le notizie degli eccidi, sembrava intollerabile e inguaribile come il nostro passato; e un'altra Italia veniva avanti, avviluppata nel cinismo settimanale, bruciata dalla speculazione, coperta di manifesti, piena di calore e di stanchezza coloniale.³

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Carlo Levi's *L'orologio* had already detected the first traces of a change of mood in postwar Rome, from the hope of the civic renovation of the country to a sense of collective disillusionment. Fortini's description of the reconstruction period in terms of the disappearance of a world seems at the same time a confirmation of Levi's perceptions and an attempt to stretch this discourse even further. The postwar sense of hope for a reconstruction of the country based on the 'resistenza' as the founding act of the new historical course had indeed left its place to a sense of frustration and disillusionment about Italy's future. For Fortini, the cleansing of ruins, debris and refuse matter, which had marked the early phase of urban reconstruction, had been replaced by a cityscape characterized by a sense of general malaise.

The recognition of a marked temporal shift, perceived through the observation of a mutating cityscape – in this case that of Rome – appears also to animate Pasolini's poetry collection *Le ceneri di Gramsci*, which was published, like Fortini's book, in 1957. In the poem 'Il pianto della scavatrice', Pasolini writes:

³ Franco Fortini, *Dieci inverni, 1947-1957: contributi ad un discorso socialista* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1957), p. 12.

A gridare è, straziata [...] la vecchia scavatrice [...] o, nel breve confine dell'orizzonte novecentesco, / tutto il quartiere...È la città, sprofondata in un chiarore di festa, / è il mondo [...] Piange ciò che ha / fine e ricomincia [...] Piange ciò che muta, anche / per farsi migliore. La luce / del futuro non cessa un solo istante / di ferirci.⁴

What Pasolini describes through the allegorical image of a 'crying' mechanical digger is the rapid process of urban and social modernization which Rome is undergoing during the 1950s and which the poet perceives as a traumatic experience. Pasolini's pessimistic framing of notions of progress and of the future recalls Fortini's metaphorical description of the same historical turn as an 'incandescent metal'. Both Fortini and Pasolini appear indeed to frame the period of the reconstruction and modernization of the country as a movement towards fall and decay.

In the discussion of the cultural and social changes which occurred during the 1950s, Roman intellectual and artistic circles occupied a particular place. If in the immediate postwar period the international success of neorealist films placed Rome at the centre of the map of cosmopolitan cultural elites, during the 1950s this renewed centrality was confirmed by the consolidation of a group of late-modernist intellectuals based in Rome. This group included the writers Alberto Moravia, Elsa Morante, Carlo Levi and Pier Paolo Pasolini, the poets Giorgio Caproni, Amelia Rosselli, Attilio Bertolucci and Sandro Penna, and the film directors Luchino Visconti, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni and Bernardo Bertolucci.⁵

⁴ Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Le ceneri di Gramsci', in *Tutte le poesie*, ed. by Walter Siti, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), I, pp. 775-870 (pp. 848-49).

⁵ It is not a coincidence that Fortini, commenting on his growing distance with Pasolini, defines late-1950s Rome an international intellectual centre: 'alla fine degli anni Cinquanta – nel pieno del "miracolo" che aveva fatto di Roma un centro internazionale e anche mondano dove si stava affermando un forte gruppo di potere intellettuale rappresentato da Moravia, dalla Morante, da Pasolini stesso e da altri non pochi'. See Franco Fortini, *Attraverso Pasolini* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), p. 228-29. While the reasons which lie behind Fortini's negative assessment of Roman intellectual circles go beyond the argument I am trying to develop here, what Fortini's critique appears to confirm is precisely Rome's intellectual hegemony in late-1950s and early-1960s Italy. For a literary account of this period see Sandra Petri, *Addio a Roma* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2012).

The journal *Nuovi Argomenti* best represented the blossoming importance of the city's intellectual elite during this period of rapid changes. Founded in 1953 by Alberto Moravia and Alberto Carocci with the aim of promoting a more direct involvement of writers and intellectuals in social and political matters, *Nuovi argomenti* quickly became one of Italy's most important cultural journals. Publishing articles by some of the most prominent Italian and European intellectuals, from György Lúkacs to Italo Calvino, from Theodor Adorno to Carlo Levi, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Ernesto de Martino, *Nuovi argomenti* not only represented the most visible symptom of the 'Europeanization' of the Roman intelligentsia, but also contributed to the development of an Italian discourse on modernity. This intention is stated already in the introduction to the first issue, published in April 1953, in which Moravia and Carocci defined the aim of the journal as that of 'trattare gli argomenti nuovi o giunti a maturazione dalla fine della guerra in poi in Italia'. For them, the optimism of the immediate postwar years was followed by a process of 'crisi di fondo che investe la nostra società e il suo modo di valutare se stessa' –, a process which needed to be investigated in all its complexity and profundity.⁶ As this statement makes clear, the course undertaken by Italian society in the post-war period – its shift towards a neo-liberal pattern of modernity, shaped on the American model – is framed by these intellectuals as a critical process that needed to be framed and analysed with new intellectual instruments and tools.

3.2. Survivals, Cohabitations and Clashes: Ernesto de Martino and the Modern Loss

Towards the late 1950s, a remarkable number of articles published in *Nuovi argomenti* started to address capitalist modernity in terms of a cultural clash between pre-modern

⁶ Alberto Carocci and Alberto Moravia, 'Introduzione', *Nuovi argomenti*, 1 (1953), 1-2 (p. 1).

and modern civilizations, coexisting in the same society though following different cultural and temporal patterns. Pasolini's work on popular Italian poetry entitled *Canzoniere italiano* (1955), Rocco Scotellaro's works *Contadini del sud* (1954) and *Uva puttanella* (1955), Carlo Levi's introduction to Scotellaro's work, Lanternari's articles on modernity and religion, and above all de Martino's essays on the survival of funeral laments in civilized Europe, were all attempts to update the discourse on capitalist modernity from a quintessentially Italian (and, I would argue, more specifically 'Roman') perspective. Despite their different approaches and fields of investigation, the common thread between these articles was constituted by their interest in the social groups that had been marginalized by society as a consequence of Italy's transformation from a rural to an industrial economy. These social groups included the urban and suburban underclasses living in the biggest Italian cities such as Rome, Milan and Turin, and the peasants of the Italian countryside, in particular those living in the most peripheral areas of regions such as Basilicata and Calabria – the so-called 'civiltà contadina'.

The journal's interest in peasant civilization as an essential theme for the understanding of Italian modernity already emerges in the second issue of *Nuovi argomenti*, published in June 1953, which included the first of Ernesto de Martino's accounts of his ethnologic expedition in Lucania. De Martino's description differentiated between the peasant civilization of Lucania and those of similar pre-modern populations such as the Aranda in Australia, the Yamana and Selk'nam in Southern America, or the Tungusi in Siberia: while these latter civilizations lived in complete isolation and did not participate in the institutional (modern) life of the countries in which they were located, the 'civiltà contadina' of Southern Italy was a

social group that was directly oppressed and exploited by the Italian state.⁷ The publication of Rocco Scotellaro's *Uva puttarella* also had a notable impact on the debate of this topic, as it represented a vivid testimony of the language, the ideas and the dreams of the 'civiltà contadina'. As stated by Carlo Levi in his introduction to Scotellaro's work (also published in *Nuovi argomenti*), 'Tutti questi frammenti, pur nel loro disordine e nella loro incompiutezza, entrano nel quadro di un'opera che è la più viva espressione e la più diretta testimonianza di un mondo nuovo di immagini e di vita, che nasce dal movimento contadino, lo rappresenta e lo esprime'.⁸

De Martino's analysis continued in an article published in February 1955, in which he presented his field-research on the 'funeral lament' in Lucania describing it as a remnant of a millennial cultural practice originating in ancient Greece. For him, the disappearance of this ancient ritual from the most advanced European centres and its confinement to the most remote rural peripheries was a result of the advancement of modern industrial civilization:

Appena due secoli fa il lamento funebre sopravviveva ancora nelle campagne di quasi tutta Europa, e anche negli strati sociali più arretrati di molti centri urbani: solo nei secoli decimottavo e decimonono il costume recedette rapidamente [...] La parte d'Europa che ha perduto definitivamente il lamento è anche quella che per prima fu aperta al sorgere e al diffondersi della moderna civiltà industriale.⁹

⁷ Ernesto de Martino, 'Note di viaggio', *Nuovi argomenti*, 2 (1953), 47-79: 'L'interesse per le formazioni culturali nate dall'esperienza di una radicale precarietà esistenziale e maturate nella lotta contro l'angoscia di mantenersi come persone davanti all'insorgere dei momenti critici dell'esistenza storica, questo interesse mi spinse già a compiere un viaggio ideale, e a esplorare il mondo magico degli Aranda australiani, degli Yamana e dei Selk'nam della Terra del Fuoco, dei Tungusi della Siberia. Ma a quel viaggio ideale mancava appunto l'esperienza di un incontro reale con un concreto mondo culturale di oppressi (come che sia determinata questa oppressione, dalla natura o dagli uomini). Per questo incontro bastava tuttavia molto meno di un viaggio in un continente lontano: bastava un viaggio di dieci ore, parte in treno e parte in auto, sino a raggiungere una terra che si stende a quattrocento chilometri da Roma. Data la loro natura di documento vivo di una umanità che cerca drammaticamente un'altra umanità, queste note di viaggio non contemplano solo la vita culturale dei contadini e dei pastori della Lucania, ma anche la reazione del mio proprio mondo culturale alle esperienze della spedizione' (p. 48).

⁸ Carlo Levi, 'Nota introduttiva', *Nuovi argomenti*, 17-18 (1955-1956), 1-5 (p. 3).

⁹ Ernesto de Martino, 'Considerazioni storiche sul lamento funebre lucano', *Nuovi argomenti*, 12 (1955), 1-33 (pp. 9-10).

What this argumentation reveals is the specific effect of industrial modernity on those sectors of the population which are, willingly or unwillingly, excluded from this process: the disappearance of ancient cultural practices such as the funeral lament, and the appearance of typically modern pathologies such as neurosis and schizophrenia, appear to testify to a cultural fracture within modern Europe. On the one side there is the modern industrial civilization which retains power and establishes new rules, laws and values; and on the other is the peasant civilization, with its ancient mores and rites, which is completely marginalized by the modern society in its administration of power.

From a historical perspective, the cohabitation of different civilizations within the same society appears to suggest a process of temporal splitting that was taking root in Europe: the survival of pre-modern ways of living and experiencing life is juxtaposed with the appearance of modern ones. Thus, the recognition of a temporal fracture brought about by capitalist modernity, which in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attracted the interest of many European intellectuals – from Jean Jacques Rousseau to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels – seems to become, towards the end of the 1950s, a question of remarkable relevance for the intellectuals gravitating around *Nuovi argomenti*.

De Martino directly addresses this question in an article published in February 1958 and entitled ‘Perdita della presenza e crisi del cordoglio’, in which he investigates the phenomenon of ‘identity loss’ as a typical pathology of modern industrial civilizations.¹⁰ He describes this process in terms of a ‘disarticolazione della dialettica del tempo’, highlighting how, in the individual mind of a pathological person as well as in the collective psychology of societies in crisis, the relationship between past and present is characterized by a dynamics of temporal disjunction: ‘per la presenza malata il “presente” perde la sua autenticità esistenziale e la sua attualità storica, e tende a

¹⁰ Ernesto de Martino, ‘Perdita della presenza e crisi del cordoglio’, *Nuovi argomenti*, 30 (1958), 49-92.

configurarsi a vario titolo come simbolo del passato non oltrepassato'.¹¹ De Martino's emphasis on concepts such as survival, remnants, temporal disruption, pathological presence and identity loss suggests a renewed interest in a theme – that of the intrinsic relationship between modernity and pathology – which had been broadly discussed in Austrian, Swiss, German and French intellectual circles since the end of the nineteenth century.¹² However, the novelty of de Martino's analysis resides in his treatment of oppressed social groups as elements of potential disruption in the fight for a better society. For de Martino, the presence of a pre-modern civilization such as the 'civiltà contadina' at the heart of twentieth-century Europe represented a possibility of resistance to the violent dynamics of the industrial civilization.

In the Italian cultural debate, this issue had already been addressed by Antonio Gramsci, who had defined the lack of political representation of the Southern Italian peasants as a problem intrinsic to the logic of Italian capitalism, which in turn was based on a pact between Northern entrepreneurs and Southern land-owners.¹³ In *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* (1945), Carlo Levi gave literary representation to these usually unrepresented social groups by portraying the complete isolation of the peasant population of Grassano and Aliano – two small towns located in the hills of Basilicata – in the context of fascist Italy. The persistence of this issue throughout Italian history, from the country's unification, to the fascist 'ventennio', to the postwar period, demonstrates the difficulty of including in the democratic life of Italian society an enormous mass of people who were living outside its dominant economic, cultural, spatial and temporal

¹¹ De Martino, 'Perdita della presenza', p. 51.

¹² Here I am referring to the corpus of psychological works which led to the birth of psychoanalysis as a discipline. See, for example, Jean Martin Charcot, *Charcot, The Clinician: The Tuesday Lessons, Excerpts from Nine Case Presentations on General Neurology Delivered at the Salpêtrière Hospital in 1887-88*, trans. by Christopher G. Goetz (New York: Raven Press, 1987); Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria*, trans. by Nicola Luckhurst (London: Penguin Books, 2004); Ludwig Binswanger, *Dream and Existence*, ed. by Keith Hoeller (Seattle: Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry, 1986).

¹³ See Antonio Gramsci, *La questione meridionale*, ed. by Franco De Felice and Valentino Parlato (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1966).

dynamics. However, what seems to differentiate this reinvigorated debate on the ‘civiltà contadina’ after Gramsci’s analysis and Levi’s literary representation of the South is the recognition, in the late 1950s and early ’60s, of an ongoing historical shift which was drastically reconfiguring Italy’s social dynamics and putting at risk the very existence of these social groups.

The debate continued with the publication, in April 1959, of issue 59 of *Nuovi argomenti*, entitled ‘Mito e civiltà moderna’. In an article included in the volume, de Martino deals with the crisis and possible salvation of modern civilization through a discussion of the concepts of primordiality and infancy in psychoanalysis. His article discusses concepts such as ‘death drive’ and ‘eternal return’ in relation to the works of authors such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, Karl Kerény and Mircea Eliade. What particularly interests de Martino is the possibility of comparing the concepts of the primordial and that of infancy. More specifically, he theorizes the existence of a strong correspondence between the marginal position occupied by the ‘civiltà contadina’ within modern industrial societies and Freud’s conception of infancy within the life of the individual:

La psicoanalisi soprattutto ha saputo utilizzare come principale mezzo di guarigione il ricordo, la rammemorazione degli eventi primordiali. Ma all’orizzonte della spiritualità moderna e in conformità con la concezione giudaico-cristiana del tempo storico e irreversibile, il primordiale non poteva essere che la prima infanzia, il solo e vero inizio individuale.¹⁴

Hence, industrial civilization’s attempt to progressively erase pre-modern civilizations appears to be, in de Martino’s view, an attempt to suppress infancy, which he considers, in relation to a Judeo-Christian conception of time, the origin of individual’s subjectivity. De Martino therefore links the crisis of the modern civilization to its attempt to oppress the primordial through its ‘normalization’ within the social dynamics

¹⁴ Ernesto de Martino, ‘Mito, scienze religiose e civiltà moderna’, *Nuovi argomenti*, 37 (1959), 4-48 (p. 14).

of the modern capitalist society. Read in these terms, the ‘civiltà contadina’ would represent the survival of infancy in contemporary times, and the process of homologizing of civilization promoted by capitalist modernity would risk enacting a dangerous ‘pathological’ turn in modern Europe: the deletion of its primordial civilizations corresponds to the individual’s repression of infancy.

As the development of de Martino’s argument demonstrates, these issues of *Nuovi argomenti* reveal the broad ramifications that the investigation of the concept of modernity was undergoing between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s in Italy. In the following issue of the journal, the literary critic Elémire Zolla published an article in which he introduced to the Italian public the figure of Walter Benjamin, three years before the first edition of a selection of Benjamin’s writings was released by Einaudi with the title *Angelus novus*.¹⁵ Zolla’s interest in Benjamin reveals a precocious acknowledgment of the importance that the German philosopher was to have in the following decades for the study of urban modernity. In this regard, this attention to Benjamin seems to testify to the sudden surfacing of a further question, that of life in the metropolis, which in Italy was starting to become of great importance only at that point, as a consequence of the sudden urban explosion of cities such as Milan, Turin and Rome. Rome, in particular, was visibly expanding its limits towards the country, a process confirmed by a demographic increase of half a million inhabitants from the beginning of the 1950s to the early 1960s, when the population in the city reached the number of two million people. In the space of twenty-five years, from the census of 1936 to that of 1961, the number of residents in the Italian capital doubled. In light of these numbers, there is small wonder that Benjamin was beginning to become an

¹⁵ Elémire Zolla, ‘Industria e letteratura’, *Nuovi argomenti*, 35-36 (1958-1959), pp. 52-55.

important point of reference for many intellectuals who were investigating the symptoms of Italian modernity in the 1960s.¹⁶

Another aspect of modernity which seems to interest both de Martino and the historian of religion Vittorio Lanternari is the advancement of a process of secularization of religion which accompanied the emergence of Italy's industrial revolution in these years. In an article entitled 'La religione e la sua essenza: un problema storico', Lanternari analysed the progressive secularization of the sense of the sacred in European culture through a discussion of authors such as Freud, Jung, Eliade, Giambattista Vico, Edward Bennett Tylor, Bronislaw Malinowski and James Frazer. What is particularly relevant here is Lanternari's emphasis on the concepts of 'the primordial', 'survival' and the clash between primitive and modern civilizations, which he develops in his discussion of Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), a book which the Italian anthropologist considers as the founding text in the modern history of religion.¹⁷ This approach also returns in an article written by de Martino in which he addresses the secularization of religion within modern societies as a problem of progressive marginalization due to its apparent 'irrationality'. However, in de Martino's view, religion is not irrational per se but became irrational and 'alienated' precisely in the context of modern industrial societies, based on a completely different epistemological paradigm: 'la religione non è un prodotto dell'alienazione, ma lo è diventato o la sta

¹⁶ For a detailed reconstruction of Benjamin's reception in Italy see Girolamo De Michele, *Tiri mancini: Walter Benjamin e la critica in Italia* (Milan: Mimesis, 2000).

¹⁷ Vittorio Lanternari, 'La religione e la sua essenza: un problema storico', *Nuovi argomenti*, 49-50 (1961), 1-64: 'Solamente nella seconda metà del sec. XIX doveva sorgere una scienza delle religioni moderna. Il contributo primo gli venne dall'esperienza, a quel tempo ormai rilevante, delle civiltà coloniali, e insomma dei popoli oggetto di studio dell'etnologia. Colui che può considerarsi il fondatore della scienza religiosa moderna è Edward Bennett Tylor, studioso inglese il quale nel 1871 pubblicò un'opera in due volumi, *Primitive culture*, che apriva un nuovo orizzonte alla cultura e al pensiero moderni [...] L'animismo secondo il Tylor è la religione primordiale dell'umanità, e i popoli arretrati ancor oggi viventi (o da poco estinti) rappresentano secondo lui altrettante sopravvivenze tardive di una civiltà preistorica, ormai da tempo superata dai popoli più evoluti' (p. 26).

diventando oggi, nella civiltà moderna: vi sono civiltà ed epoche culturali in cui la religione assolve una precisa funzione razionale'.¹⁸

In light of these discussions, statements and analyses, we can argue that the Italian discourse on capitalist modernity emerges in the moment of Italy's move from an agricultural to an industrial civilization, focusing on concepts such as the disarticulation of time, temporal disruptions and cultural survivals. On the one hand, this discussion led to an update of the theoretical discourse on modernity through the integration of disciplines such as psychoanalysis, cultural anthropology and history of religion which in Central and Northern Europe had begun much earlier. On the other hand, once circulating among Italian intellectuals, these disciplines entered into a dynamic reticulum of discussions which mixed Marxism, the growing importance of Gramsci following the publication of his *Quaderni dal carcere*, and the attempt to revise the lesson of Croce's idealism (in particular with de Martino).

3.3. The Interstitial Position of Rome in the Cartography of Western Modernity

What we could say is that the blossoming of a discourse on capitalist modernity developed by the intellectuals writing for *Nuovi argomenti* appears in some respects to have anticipated by some years the discussion of themes such as cultural hegemony, homologation and social oppression within disciplines such as subaltern studies and postcolonial studies. At the same time, the role played by the journal in the development of a debate on modernity reveals the growing importance of Rome as a cultural centre. What precisely these crossings, as well as the interferences and the overlaps emerging from the debates within this group of intellectuals demonstrate is the progressive growth

¹⁸ de Martino, 'Postilla a Scarcia', *Nuovi argomenti*, 59-60 (1963), 57-62 (p. 61).

of Rome as a centre of aggregation and circulation of ideas, and as a setting which allowed the *Nuovi argomenti* group of intellectuals and artists to witness the advance of modernity from a semi-peripheral – or better, interstitial – position within the context of postwar Europe.

The recognition of the development of a process of dismemberment of traditional ways of living and forms of experience, in which a still undefined notion of ‘modernity’ replaces a shared idea of tradition, goes well beyond Pasolini’s and Fortini’s artistic production and cultural analyses, becoming a focal theme for many other Italian writers, film directors, philosophers, and anthropologists working at the beginning of the 1960s. Michelangelo Antonioni’s trilogy on modern man’s alienation, consisting of *L’avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961) and *L’eclisse* (1962); Federico Fellini’s representation of an on-going shift in the way of living of the Italian society in *La dolce vita* (1959), *8 ½* (1963) and *Giulietta degli spiriti* (1965); the Gruppo ’63’s attempt to revive an avant-gardist spirit in Italian literature; and the re-emergence of the Southern question in terms of a fracture between the modern North and the pre-modern South – these could all be interpreted as attempts to make sense of the impact that modern industrial civilization was having on Italian culture and society.

From the point of view of an intellectual history of the concept of modernity, Italian writers, artists and intellectuals operating in the late 1950s and early 1960s appeared to feel the need to come to terms with the notion of modernity in a way similar to that which occurred in mid-nineteenth-century England and France and early twentieth-century Germany. Parallels can be found with the discourses and the poetics developed in England by John Ruskin, William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood; in France by Victor Hugo, Charles Baudelaire and Utopian-socialists such as Henri de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier; in Germany by social theorists such as Oswald

Spengler, Max Weber, Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin.¹⁹ While these attempts to frame the process of capitalist modernity in artistic, anthropological and psychological terms did not immediately find many Italian interlocutors during the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, in the period after the Second World War, as a consequence of the rapid implementation of neo-capitalist modernization in Italy, a wider interest in the articulation of the discourse of modernity appears to spread among Italian intellectuals. As we have seen, Rome emerges as privileged location from which to witness the rise of neo-capitalist modernity thanks to its semi-peripheral position within the European scenario.

In this phase of rapid expansion Rome appears indeed to be characterized by the coexistence of different temporalities: the neo-liberal pattern developed by the modernizers of the postwar period cohabits indeed with the legacy left by fascism, with the socialist idea of modernity represented by the Italian Communist Party (the biggest in the Western world), and with the survival of ‘pre-modern’ social groups living outside the dynamics of modernity (the Roman underclasses living in the unofficial ‘borgate’ and the ‘società contadina’ in the countryside surrounding the city). In light of this, the specific position of Rome within the map of Western modernity in the 1950s appears to be characterized by the interstitial cohabitation of very heterogeneous forces clashing against each other.

¹⁹ This list is by no means exhaustive, but rather indicative of some key-thinkers and artists who frame the rise of industrial modernity as a historical fracture. While it is impossible to provide a full bibliography, for works analysing the concept of modernity in terms of fracture and historical shift see at least Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997); Giorgio Agamben, *Infanzia e storia: distruzione dell'esperienza e origine della storia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978); Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt and trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007); Marshall Berman, *All that Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ninfa Moderna: saggio sul pannello caduto*, trans. by Aurelio Pino (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2004); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Sigmund Freud, ‘Civilization and Its Discontents’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), XXI, pp. 59-148; David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1985); Juergen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Boston: MIT Press, 1987); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*; Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002).

Thus, towards the end of the 1950s, Rome undergoes a process of urban and cultural dilation at the crossroad between the American model of modernization, now best represented by the case of New York, the technocratic modernity represented by Soviet Moscow, and a sort of pre-modern temporality represented by a stereotypical idea of non-corrupted and authentic ‘South’. It is precisely its interstitial position within the cartography of Western modernity that allows Rome to become a place of condensation of very peculiar and emblematic images of modernity. The glamorous and at the same time vacuous imaginary created by Federico Fellini’s *La dolce vita* stems from the hectic cultural environment of 1950s Rome, as well as the image of the popular and vitalistic city depicted in Pasolini’s Roman novels and writings, which represent the objects of analysis of the next two chapters.

4. An Atlas of Rome's Modernity: Fellini's *La dolce vita*

Having established Rome's renewed role as an artistic and intellectual centre and its privileged position for witnessing the effects of late modernity in post-reconstruction Europe, in this chapter I will try to investigate the effects that this cultural and social process had on the formation of Rome's modernist imagery. I will do so by analyzing Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1959) as an exemplary case study for the understanding of the intersection between the paradigm of fragmentation and the disarticulation of temporality brought about by modernity and the process of dilation of Rome's space during the 1950s. In doing so, I will firstly focus on the outcomes of the crisis of representation that invested cinema and literature after the neorealist period and the consequences that crisis had on the formation of Fellini's image of Rome. What seems to characterize Rome's representation in film and literature during the years of Italy's modernity is a re-configuration of the marginal and peripheral imagery which had emerged soon after the end of the Second World War. The investigation of this paradigmatic shift, together with the attempt to delineate the potential existence of a 'Roman' modernist aesthetics and imagery common to literature and cinema will be the focal point of this chapter.

4.1. The 'Paparazzo' and the Camera Gaze: The Cinematization of Everyday Life in 1950s Rome

The opening scene of Fellini's *La dolce vita* captures the image of a dilated and undefined cityscape.¹ The camera follows the journey of a statue of Christ, which, carried by a helicopter, is transported from outside Rome to its religious centre – Saint

¹ *La dolce vita*, dir. by Federico Fellini (Cineriz, 1960).

Peter's Square. In the sequence, the statue is tracked in a series of long shots as it flies over a scattered urban landscape which is undergoing striking changes. The setting moves from the Parco degli Acquedotti (fig. 4.1), characterized by remnants of an old Roman aqueduct, to a popular area, along the via Tuscolana, full of cranes and apartment buildings in construction (fig. 4.2), and then to a residential area where a group of women sunbathe on a building's roof (fig. 4.3). Finally, in the last shot, we see the statue arriving in Saint Peter's Square while the bells are ringing (fig. 4.4).



Figs. 4.1-4.4: The movement of Christ's statue around Rome in *La dolce vita* from the city's countryside, characterized by ancient remnants (fig. 4.1), to the religious centre of the city represented by St. Peter Square (fig. 4.4), passing through newly built neighborhoods (fig. 4.3) and areas still in construction (fig. 4.4)

From an urban and spatial perspective, what this sequence captures is the ongoing expansion of Rome's cityscape, in which the fast rate of urbanization fills the voids which had characterized the city in the immediate postwar period, and is now progressively eating up portions of the Roman countryside (fig. 4.3). In the twelve episodes which compose *La dolce vita*, the gaze of the camera and the characters which populate Fellini's film float around a transient and dismembered space. Glamorous and historical locations such as via Veneto, the Fontana di Trevi and piazza del Popolo are

juxtaposed with modern alienated peripheries or with aristocratic villas in the countryside, thus producing the picture of a very heterogeneous and mutating cityscape.

As this first sequence of *La dolce vita* testifies, the image of Rome between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s is associated with a complex and blurred entity which is undergoing a process of urban reshaping. In Fellini's film, a sense of restlessness, dilation and vagueness seizes Rome's cityscape as well as the characters who populate its bars and streets. Marcello, the main character of the story, is a relatively successful journalist, but despite this he appears aimless and keeps wandering around the city chasing something that he will never reach. Emma, Marcello's girlfriend, is in constant crisis, while Maddalena, his lover, is unable to feel or commit herself to anything, and always appears alone in the most random and disparate locations. Steiner, an intellectual and apparently the most solid character of the film, eventually falls into a crisis of his own, killing his children before committing suicide.

Going back to the first sequence of the movie, what the journey of the statue of Christ *into* Rome's city centre essentially symbolizes is precisely the sense of indeterminacy and the emptying of meaning bound to the advent of modernity. People's welcoming of the statue as the real Messiah – a fact testified by shouting children and by the sunbather's exclamation 'Guarda, è Gesù!' – seems to indicate the displacement of religiosity and spirituality into a form of spectacle to be captured by the camera eye. As noted by Frank Burke, in this 'Coming' to Rome, Jesus is no more than a simulacrum of its sacred image and the 'theatrical effect of the statue's appearance points to a society in which spectacle has replaced more spiritual forms of renewal'.² The statue of Christ hanging over the cityscape of Rome thus becomes a symptom of the commodification of spirituality which Walter Benjamin described as an immanent

² Frank Burke, *Federico Fellini: Variety Lights to La Dolce Vita* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), p. 99.

element of modern life.³ In a sense, Fellini's film registers an on-going process of fragmentation of traditional ways of experiencing, living and moving throughout the city which places his Rome close to other paradigmatic cities of modernity, such as Baudelaire's Paris, for example. As argued by Alessia Ricciardi, *La dolce vita* can be said to express 'the Spleen of Rome'.⁴

In other words, Fellini's film captures the image of a city which overcame the ruinous cityscape of the immediate postwar period, recorded by early neorealist films, and in doing so it enacts a sort of oedipal killing of the neorealist image and aesthetic. Fellini himself framed the movement from neorealist to post-neorealist cinema in terms of a historical shift, from the ruinous and adventurous cityscape of the postwar period, to the renovated and 'flattened' cityscape of the reconstruction period. In his words:

Subito dopo la guerra ciascuno di noi vedeva il mondo con gli occhi di un bambino. Tutto era così nuovo, così avventuroso. Un mondo era crollato e ne stava nascendo un altro. Abbiamo vissuto degli anni magnifici, nonostante tutti i guai che ha passato l'Italia. Dove ti voltavi, trovavi qualcosa da raccontare. [...] A un certo punto, come tutte le cose, anche il dopoguerra è finito. Le strade delle nostre città sono ridiventate strade, dove la gente passeggia, va e viene dagli uffici, si muove in una luce anonima [...]. Di fronte a questa realtà appiattita, normalizzata, bisogna essere poeti. Bisogna inventare e avere qualcosa da dire, il documento non basta più. Così è venuta fuori la crisi di un certo modo di concepire il cinema, il retroterra culturale del neorealismo si è rivelato troppo esiguo, l'improvvisazione ha mostrato la corda.⁵

Fellini's words underline the director's perception of a change in the cinematic image, which, in his view, occurred between the immediate postwar period and the 1960s. In order to describe this change, he uses the image of a mutating cityscape. For him, the scattered but vital cityscape of the postwar city – the one magisterially captured by Carlo Levi in *L'orologio* – seemed to have made space, throughout the 1950s, for a

³ Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt and trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), pp. 155-200. See also Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Arendt, pp. 217-52, in which he reflects on the fall of experience and the decline of the artistic aura in modernity.

⁴ See Alessia Ricciardi, 'The Spleen of Rome: Mourning Modernism in Fellini's *La dolce vita*', *Modernism/Modernity*, 7.2 (2000), 201-19.

⁵ Federico Fellini quoted in Tullio Kezich, *Noi che abbiamo fatto La dolce vita* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2009), pp. 41-2.

normalized cityscape characterized by an anonymous light. The director who aimed to tell stories during the period of the reconstruction needed to go beyond the simple representation of reality as a 'document', and for this reason Fellini compares his role to that of the poet. This assessment, which recalls Pasolini's dichotomy between cinema of prose and cinema of poetry,⁶ introduces us to Fellini's search for an aesthetics that responded to the social and cultural changes brought about by the rise of a modern way of living.

Fellini's attempt to update the cinematic image by making it adhere to the cityscape of the reconstructed city opens up a whole discussion on the links between social and aesthetic changes in 1950s Italy. The attempt to frame such an issue has led some scholars to theorize the birth of a modernist aesthetic from the socio-cultural and urban reality of 1950s Rome. While John David Rhodes focuses on the intrinsic relationship between Rome's modernization and Pasolini's modernist style, an argument which will be developed in the next chapter, Karen Pinkus concentrates on Fellini and Rome. According to Pinkus, Fellini's porous mode of narration, in which reality and fiction appear to mix and the ruinous image of the postwar city is replaced by the 'cinematization' of everyday life, found a prototype in the way in which the Montesi case was treated and represented by the Italian media of the period.⁷

On 11 April 1953, the body of a 21-year old woman, Wilma Montesi, was found dead on the beach of Torvajonica, and the investigation which followed the case revealed the existence of a world of corruption, prostitution and drug-consumption among some of the most influential and apparently most respected circles of the Italian capital. The morbid curiosity which surrounded this case led many newspapers and

⁶ See Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Il cinema di poesia', in *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), I, pp. 1461-88.

⁷ See Karen Pinkus, *The Montesi Scandal: The Death of Wilma Montesi and the Birth of the Paparazzi in Fellini's Rome* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003) and Stephen Gundle, *Death and the Dolce Vita: The Dark Side of Rome in the 1950s* (London: Canongate, 2011).

magazines with a taste for scandal to follow the case closely and to tell the story of the characters involved in it, from important politicians to the Roman aristocracy to common people and, above all, young women such as Wilma Montesi herself. As Pinkus notes: ‘The Montesi case cannot be comprehended outside of a conceptual framework of the cinematization of everyday life that took form in postwar Italy’.⁸ Pinkus underlines the intrinsic link between the emergence of the figure of the photo-reporter and of the tabloid culture in 1950s Rome, and the materialization of a cinematic image ‘in which stars and ordinary people come increasingly to resemble one another’.⁹ This connection takes root under the gaze of the photo-reporter, the figure which Fellini and his scriptwriter, Ennio Flaiano, were to re-name ‘paparazzo’. It is precisely the eye of the ‘paparazzo’, an eye in perpetual movement around the city, which constitutes the link between everyday culture and cinema in 1950s Rome. As Pinkus says, by capturing the ‘interstitial moments of daily life’¹⁰ the ‘paparazzo’ seems able to produce a ‘porous image’ in which the high and the low, the old and the new, the artistic and the everyday, interweave with each other. Following Pinkus’s argument, I propose to look at this porous and vernacular image recorded by the ‘paparazzo’ in order to find the seeds of *La dolce vita*’s camera eye.

Pinkus’s argument could indeed easily be put into dialogue with Deleuze’s thesis about a mutation of the cinematic image from neorealism to post-neorealist aesthetic in terms of the ‘traveling spectacle’ of everyday life.¹¹ For Deleuze, while neorealist cinema successfully moved away from old realism’s attempt to capture actions and movements in a very basic and sequential way (action-image), and developed it into a ‘purely optical and sound situation’ (time-image), Fellini was able to stretch this

⁸ Pinkus, p. 2.

⁹ Pinkus, p. 2.

¹⁰ Pinkus, p. 2.

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1989), p. 5.

innovation even further. As he writes, in Fellini's films 'it is not simply the spectacle which tends to overflow the real, it is the everyday which continually organizes itself into a traveling spectacle'.¹² While in its early stages, as we have seen, the time-image was characterized by long-shots and by the slackening of spatio-temporal connections, in which the eye and the ear of the spectator became lost in the observation of a complex and multifaceted cityscape, in Fellini's cinema, the gaze of the camera floats around Rome's cityscape, producing an effect of constant movement in which the camera explores a set of locations previously unknown to the viewer. For Deleuze, the image produced by this mobile gaze is an osmotic and porous image in which the everyday is investigated and captured in all its spectacular possibilities, while at the same time creating a narrative in which what is real and what is fictional blur. As Deleuze argues, in Fellini's cinema:

we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which to ask. It is as if the real and the imaginary were running after each other, as if each was being reflected in the other, around a point of indiscernibility.¹³

Fellini's 'indiscernibility', or the indeterminacy between the real and the imaginary appears to be the result of his attempt to read and interpret reality in all its complex strata, the visible as well as the hidden ones – the surface of the picture taken by the 'paparazzo' as well as the visions and memories lying behind the surface, and deposited in the collective unconscious of the city. This principle of indeterminability appears thus to bring about a shift in the perception of reality in which the possibility of distinguishing between real and unreal fades away.¹⁴

¹² Deleuze, p. 5.

¹³ Deleuze, p. 7.

¹⁴ See Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press and BFI Publishing, 1992), in which he discusses the figure of Marcello in *La dolce vita* as a prototype of the postmodern hero who grasps 'the bewilderment of an honest schizophrenic life' (p. 42).

If we accept Pinkus's and Deleuze's arguments, the novelty which seems to follow the emergence of this 'vernacular imagery' stemming from Rome's everyday life in the 1950s is linked to the materialization of a different way of organizing shots in the cinematic sequence. Fellini's film gives shape to a narrative method which does not follow a linear development based on causality, but which proceeds through flashes.¹⁵ In this respect, commenting on the structure of *La dolce vita*, Alessia Ricciardi talks about a 'paratactic narrative structure' that 'transforms every segment into a memorial tableau' and in which 'the representative value [...] is enhanced by the looseness of the plot connections, as if the disjunction between episodes threw each one into higher symbolic relief'.¹⁶ Similarly, Frank Burke defines Fellini's movie as marked by a 'structural discontinuity' which operates 'free of the constraints of the plot',¹⁷ and Robert Richardson underlines how *La dolce vita* is 'composed of semidetached sequences, long scenes which are not always clearly related to one another'.¹⁸ Fellini himself described *La dolce vita*'s structure as a work of deconstruction and reconstruction, comparing it to Picasso's cubist technique:

inventiamo episodi, non preoccupiamoci per ora della logica del racconto. Dobbiamo fare una statua, romperla e ricomporne i pezzi. Oppure tentare una scomposizione picassiana. Il cinema è narrativa nel senso ottocentesco: ora tentiamo di fare qualcosa di diverso.¹⁹

What these statements signal is the existence of an intrinsic link between the anti-linear, loosely connected, disjointed and fragmentary structure of Fellini's film and the mobile, erratic and discontinuous gaze of the 'paparazzo', as well as the fact that both of them respond to a dynamics of temporal disarticulation which echoes de Martino's

¹⁵ See Burke, p. 107: 'As Fellini's story and characters evolve through the early films, so does his narrative method. Most noticeable is the diminishment in plot or conventional story-line and the emergence, instead, of a more complex kind of narrative structure'.

¹⁶ Ricciardi, p. 204.

¹⁷ Burke, p. 113.

¹⁸ Robert Richardson, 'Waste Lands: the Breakdown of Order', in *Federico Fellini: Essays in Criticism*, ed. by Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 103-12 (p. 104).

¹⁹ Fellini, quoted in Kezich, p. 49.

observations on the effects brought about by modernity.²⁰ The fragmentation of traditional ways of existence and the juxtaposition of heterogeneous temporalities, images and locations stemming from Rome's modernity push the explorer of this fast changing territory to constantly move around the city in order to capture snapshots of reality.

Seen in this light, *La dolce vita* could be described as a concatenation of cinematic sequences assembled one after the other in an anti-causal and non-linear way, and kept together by the figure of Marcello, who guides our point of view as spectators within the film. Fellini's movie could in fact be roughly divided into twelve – detached, paratactic and apparently unrelated – narrative sequences, all of which take us inside, outside and around Rome's cityscape. These can be summarised as follows: 1. the introductory scene, in which a statue of Christ is transposed from Rome's periphery to its religious centre – Saint Peter's Square (inward movement); 2. Maddalena's sequence, in which after meeting randomly at a night club in via Veneto, Marcello and Maddalena drive together from piazza del Popolo to Torre di Schiavo, a new neighborhood along the Tuscolana road (outward movement from the centre to the periphery); 3. Sylvia's sequence, in which Marcello follows Sylvia during her stay in Rome, from her arrival at the Ciampino airport, to a night out wandering around Rome. 4. the first Steiner sequence, in which Marcello meets Steiner inside the church of San Giovanni Bosco, near the Cinecittà studio complex; 5. the sequence of the 'Miracle of the Divine Love', in which Marcello and his girlfriend, Emma, drive to a place outside Rome (this sequence was shot at Bagni di Tivoli), in order to witness the supposed apparition of the Madonna; 6. the second Steiner sequence, in which Marcello and

²⁰ Here I am referring to de Martino's recognition of a dynamic of temporal disarticulation affecting people's subjectivities in modern industrialized societies, which was discussed in the previous chapter. See Ernesto de Martino, 'Considerazioni storiche sul lamento funebre lucano', *Nuovi argomenti*, 12 (1955), 1-33; 'Perdita della presenza e crisi del cordoglio', *Nuovi argomenti*, 30 (1958), 49-92; and 'Mito, scienze religiose e civiltà moderna', *Nuovi argomenti*, 37 (1959), 4-48.

Emma visit Steiner at his family flat in the Eur quarter; 7. Paola's sequence, in which Marcello performs his last attempt to write a novel in a restaurant at the sea-side; 8. Marcello's father's sequence: when they move from a bar in via Veneto to a night-club called *Cha Cha Cha* to the Quartiere Italia, along the Nomentana road (movements around Rome's centre); 9. the séance session: when Marcello follows a group of aristocratic and wealthy people to a castle at Bassano di Sutri,²¹ located near Viterbo, approximately seventy kilometres from Rome (outward movement to a place located outside Rome); 10. Marcello and Emma's sequence: when they fight inside Marcello's car in a desolated place along the via Appia; 11. the sequence of Steiner's death, which occurs inside his flat in the Eur quarter; 12. the final sequence, that of the collective strip-tease, which occurs inside the Fregene house of Riccardo and terminates along Fregene's beach.

In the film, the progression from one scene to the other does not proceed sequentially, from one episode to the next, as in classical Hollywood cinema, but rather follows a multi-linear, wandering movement characterized by discontinuities and interruptions similar to those which mark the walks of the *flâneur*, though here the stroll is often replaced by the car.²² At the same time, the gaze of Marcello constantly fluctuates inside, outside and around Rome's cityscape by car, scooter, or even by helicopter, as in the introductory scene. The mobility of the camera features also in the second episode of the film. Here, Marcello and Maddalena lack any direction after they leave the night-club in via Veneto: firstly they drive to piazza del Popolo and have a conversation about Rome, which for Maddalena is a boring city, while for Marcello it is a jungle where he feels that he can easily hide; then, in order to escape their boredom,

²¹ This town has now changed its name to Bassano Romano.

²² This is a dynamic which we can easily observe in many other films, novels and poems written and shot in the same years of *La dolce vita*. The presence of the car and the scooter in many artistic products of these years is not only a symptom of the sudden well-being and modernization of the Italian society, but operates as an aesthetic function as well. See, for example, Dino Risi's *Il sorpasso* (1962), Ennio Flaiano's short novel 'Adriano', to Pier Paolo Pasolini's *La religione del mio tempo* (1961).

they pick up a prostitute and drive to her flat in Tor de' Schiavi, in the Tuscolano quarter, where eventually Maddalena and Marcello sleep together. Similarly, when Marcello and Sylvia escape from the Caracalla dancing club, they seem not to have any destination. At first they wander along the via Appia Antica, outside urban Rome, then decide to drive back to Rome's historical city centre.

The randomness and accidental nature of these movements is corroborated, at a structural level, by the anti-sequentiality of the film's episodes, which, instead of progressing in a linear way, unravel through a reticular paradigm of development. Episodes 4, 6 and 11 – those portraying the figure of Steiner – could indeed be grouped together, as well as episodes 2, 5, and 10, in which we witness the crisis of Emma and Marcello's relationship.

On the aesthetic level, the irregularity of these movements becomes integral to the narrative gaze through which the city is seen and represented. What this discontinuous and fluctuating gaze seems ultimately to capture is a completely new map of Rome: dilated, in continuous expansion, contradictory and ambiguous in its cohabitation of historical remnants, new neighbourhoods still under construction, glamorous bars and clubs, miserable flats, and decorous bourgeois interiors. As the heterogeneity of this new image suggests, a process of spatial disarticulation seems to characterize the Italian city during its shift to a new phase of modernity. If in the immediate postwar period it was possible for Accrocca, Moravia, Ortese and Carlo Levi to capture the scars of post-war Rome by adopting a marginal and peripheral perspective on reality, Fellini appears to record a shifting and oscillatory image in order to capture the multi-layered strata of a city which is rapidly multiplying its locations and visibly expanding its spatial boundaries. Hence, the eye of the 'paparazzo' seems to enter, by osmosis, that of Fellini's camera, at the same time allowing us to access an entire new set of places, locations and situations which had previously remained invisible to us.

4.2. Dialectical Montage: Attraction and Rejection in *La dolce vita*

If, with *La dolce vita*, we can start to visualize the contours of a ‘Roman’ modernist aesthetics on the basis of this osmotic and intimate connection between everyday life and spectacle, what still remains unclear is the *modus operandi* of Fellini’s cinematic image: how do the images of *La dolce vita* re-produce reality, and in what way do they follow the pattern of temporal disarticulation?

A first, partial answer can be found in the resemblance between the paratactic structure of *La dolce vita* and the language of illustrated magazines. Asked about how he thought the public would react to his film, Fellini once answered: ‘Penso che *La dolce vita* possa venir accettato come un giornale filmato, un rotocalco in pellicola’.²³ In his film Fellini adopts a technique of montage similar to that of photo-magazines, in that the stories unravel through the juxtaposition of pictures splicing together snapshots taken from Rome’s daily reality. What this comparison between the narrative technique of the film and the illustrated magazine ultimately reveals is an attempt to discard the causality and linearity of the plot in the name of a non-sequential narrative based on montage. As we have already noted, for Fellini what is important is not the logical passage from one sequence to another, but rather the moment of interval between different episodes.

In this respect, Fellini’s application of montage seems closer to Sergej Eisenstein’s theory of ‘montage of attractions’ than to classical theories of film editing in which the perfect montage has to follow a linear narrative pattern in order to give a sense of continuity between the shots. Several critics of Fellini have underlined the importance of montage in his films. Peter Bondanella has shed light on the conflict which is at work in Fellini’s idea of montage, in which ‘a number of images are juxtaposed to render the

²³ Fellini, quoted in Kezich, p. 197.

disparity between modern life and the cultural achievements of the Roman past'.²⁴ Frank Burke has stressed the convoluted structure which is at work in *La dolce vita*'s narrative, suggesting a remarkable 'diminishment in plot or conventional story-line and the emergence, instead, of a more complex kind of narrative structure'.²⁵ Alessia Ricciardi has focused on the paratactic structure of Fellini's movie, noting how this process 'transforms every segment into a memorial tableau, the representative value of which is enhanced by the looseness of the plot connections, as if the disjunction between episodes threw each one into higher symbolic relief'.²⁶ While I will come back later to Ricciardi's definition of *La dolce vita* as a 'memorial tableau', for the moment I would like to concentrate on the process of opposition between the narrative sequences of the film, a process which Bondanella describes in terms of conflict, Burke in terms of convolution, and Ricciardi as a disjunction. In our analysis, what we should not forget is that all these notions are linked to the temporal and spatial disruption triggered by the advance of modernization, as de Martino and the other contributors of *Nuovi argomenti* had highlighted.

In *La dolce vita* the movement from one episode to the next appears to be marked by an analogical progression. Every new sequence is indeed apparently detached from the one which preceded it, in a way which recalls Eliot's description of the 'objective correlative' poetic technique.²⁷ At the same time though, this apparent disconnection between scenes seems to be counteracted by a principle of attraction/rejection which produces a series of internal threads between the different sequences of the film.

²⁴ Peter Bondanella, *The Eternal City: Roman Images in the Modern World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 111.

²⁵ Burke, p. 107.

²⁶ Ricciardi, p. 204.

²⁷ See T. S. Eliot, 'Hamlet and His Problems', in *The Sacred Wood, Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1960), pp. 95-103. For Eliot the 'objective correlative' is a technique which allows us to define otherwise unexplainable complex emotional concepts by enlisting their effects rather than trying to describe their nature. In this sense, we could think of *La dolce vita* as a film based on the 'objective correlative', in that each sequence stages the effects of modern life in Rome rather than trying to describe them through conventional narrative.



Figs. 4.5-4.10: attraction/rejection of bodies in Fellini's *La dolce vita*

This dialectical process becomes particularly evident at the beginning and end of the film's episodes, for instance between the end of the second episode and the beginning of the third one. Here, within a period of three minutes, we see Emma's body lying in a hospital bed after she attempted suicide (fig. 4.5), Maddalena's exhausted body sleeping in her bedroom (fig. 4.6), and Sylvia's radiant body appearing from an airplane's door, on her arrival at Ciampino airport (fig. 4.7). As this progression of shots suggests, though Fellini's cinematic camera is attracted to these bodies and lingers on their positions, it does not seem satisfied by what it sees and thus promptly moves to exploring new possibilities of fulfillment of desire. In these sequences, each body seems to gravitate around the other, at the same time generating and rejecting the other: Emma's sick body pushes the camera to seek an alternative 'desired' body; in this

sense, her body seems to generate, by visual approximation, both Maddalena's exhausted body, and Sylvia's radiant body.

However, these bodies also seem to reject each other, as every snapshot adds something to the other: Maddalena's comfortable bedroom and her body position reject the emptiness and the austerity of Emma's hospital room and the stiffness of her sick body. Even more strikingly, Sylvia's body and the glamorousness of her arrival at Ciampino airport reject both Emma's and Maddalena's 'fallen' bodies: their horizontality clashes against Sylvia's verticality. This visual difference is moreover underlined by the clash between Sylvia's figure – shot in a 'plan américain', which deliberately frames her body using an 'international' and glamorous style – and those of Emma and Maddalena – filmed in medium shots and therefore leaving more space to a wider outline of the environment.

This process of attraction/rejection also involves the bodies of Marcello, Robert (Sylvia's husband) and Steiner between the end of the third episode and the beginning of the fourth one. Firstly, Robert's body rejects Marcello's when he punches him in front of the Excelsior hotel (fig. 4.8); then, in the following snapshot, Marcello's body is driven towards Steiner's until he decides to follow him into the church of San Giovanni Bosco (fig. 4.9). Then, after Steiner starts playing Bach's 'Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor', Marcello walks away from Steiner's body (fig. 4.10). As these sequences suggest, a dynamic of attraction and rejection characterizes the way in which the characters interact with each other and circulate around Rome's dilating cityscape.

Fellini's attempt to produce meaning through a bipolar (and magnetic) process of attraction/rejection can also be observed in the movement of the camera gaze around Rome's heterogeneous cityscape. The oscillatory and wandering movement of the camera appears to challenge any pre-constituted image of Rome: the postcard image of the 'Eternal City' as well as the squalid and miserable image of Rome's periphery.

Fellini's camera attempts to explore any interstice of Rome's cityscape. One could easily demonstrate that *La dolce vita*, of all the 'canonical' films set in Rome during these years – from Dino Risi's *Il sorpasso* (1962), to Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'eclisse* (1962), Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962), or Bernardo Bertolucci's *La commare secca* (1962) – is the one which covers the most of its expanding topographical surface and does so more exhaustively. This dynamic operates in most of the film's episodes, though, as already mentioned, the introductory sequence is paradigmatic in this respect, as the camera covers a vast territory, from the ancient Roman countryside to the new residential areas located in the city's periphery, to Saint Peter's Square in the Vatican.



Figs. 4.11-4.14: the heterogeneity of Rome's locations captured by Fellini's camera in *La dolce vita*

Another example of the interaction between Rome's different locations constitutes an important thread of both the second episode of the film, when Marcello and Maddalena move around a number of distinct Roman locations: from via Veneto (fig. 4.11) to piazza del Popolo (fig. 4.12) to the modern housing projects of the Tor de' Schiavi. Another example is constituted by the third episode, when Marcello and Sylvia drive

from the Caracalla baths (fig. 4.13) to the via Appia Antica (fig. 4.14) and the historical city centre. The exploration of Rome's cityscape also encompasses further extremes of its suburban area, such as the beach at Fregene (as in the last sequence), Bassano di Sutri (a town located seventy kilometres north of Rome) and Tivoli (where the sequence of the Divine Field is set). What seems to characterize this process of constant wandering is, again, a dialectic of rejection and attraction. The camera's gaze seems indeed to enter into an ethereal relationship with Rome's locations. It moves around the scene focusing and zooming in on specific locations, situations and characters, and it does so by following an oscillatory movement rather than proceeding in a straightforward way.

One of the consequences of this 'irregular' and deflected relationship between Fellini's camera gaze and Rome's cityscape is that the dilated, fast expanding and discontinuous nature of Rome's urban structure appears to enter directly into the anti-linear, interrupted and analogical montage technique adopted by the film. In this respect, the intimate link between the modernizing Rome and Fellini's use of the montage technique recalls Eisenstein's description of Athens' Acropolis as an 'incubator' of cinematic montage. In an article on the relationship between montage and urban architecture Eisenstein shed light on the intrinsic correspondences between Athens' classical architecture and the montage technique, underlining how strolling around Athens' Acropolis can be considered an 'experience' of montage; in his words 'it is hard to imagine a montage sequence for an architectural ensemble more subtly composed, shot by shot, than the one our legs create by walking among the buildings of the Acropolis'.²⁸ For Eisenstein, it is our ability to re-assemble the scattered fragments of a given context which constitutes the basis of montage, and in this respect the story 'narrated' by the Acropolis could be interpreted as a prototype of cinematic narratives.

²⁸ Sergei M. Eisenstein, 'Montage and Architecture', trans. by Yve Alain-Bois and Michael Glenny, *Assemblage*, 10 (1989), 110-31 (p. 117).

Likewise, Fellini's Rome can also be thought of as a paradigmatic example of cinematic montage. The spatial vastness of its topography and the temporal complexity of its architecture appear to directly enter Fellini's camera, influencing the style of its narration. What I am arguing here is that the fragmentary, paratactic, anti-linear and hyper-stratified aesthetics of Fellini, which found in *8 ½* (1963) its highest expression, stem directly from his attempt to record Rome's mutating cityscape. The shattered, fleeting and traumatized cityscape of the postwar city captured by neorealist movies mutates into a dilating and fast-changing cityscape, which only the quick eye of the 'paparazzo' appears able to capture. What this osmotic relation between *La dolce vita*'s (modernist) aesthetics and Rome's (modern) topography appears therefore to signal is a paradigm shift of the neorealist time-image into a more elaborate form of it. In *La dolce vita*, what the variety of locations and the complexity of the film's montage technique indicate is a drastic movement of the point of observation of the film director. If the street remains the most privileged location from which to witness reality, what the paratactic, fragmentary and anti-linear structure of *La dolce vita* brings to light is the consolidation of a way of representing reality based on the ability to extract fragments, pictures and images from a fast changing reality in order to re-assemble them into a meaningful mosaic: in modernity the observer also has to become an assembler.

4.3. Fellini's Wall: A Visual Archive of Rome's Modernity

Having established that the method of composition adopted by Fellini in *La dolce vita* is based on a specific application of montage characterized by a mechanism of attraction-rejection, I will now try to understand the way in which this anti-linear and combinatorial system of image production works. What kind of images does Fellini capture and how does his visual archive function? A possible clue that might allow us to

answer this question comes from Tullio Kezich's account of Fellini's office-wall when he was preparing and filming *La dolce vita*. Kezich describes Fellini's wall as:

tappezzato di promettenti fotografie, di ritagli tratti da settimanali. Sono altrettante finestre sul film. Da ogni parte si guardano donne bellissime, con abiti firmati dalle maggiori sartorie; mostruose automobili fuori serie che testimoniano di un lusso sfrenato [...] una serie di immagini di Via Veneto, con i tavoli illuminati e la gente che passa leggera in una notte d'estate [...]. Altre fotografie, sparse qua e là, formano una specie di curioso controcanto: una villa di campagna con stanze stupende; una vecchia torre solitaria contro il cielo in mezzo a una campagna brulla; una folla di fedeli che vede calare, al centro di piazza Navona, un elicottero con la statua di Cristo.²⁹

Many of the pictures that Kezich noticed on Fellini's wall will be later 'put into motion', becoming some of the most iconic sequences of the movie: from the image of via Veneto by night illuminated by electric lights, to the fast and luxurious cars driven by many of the film's characters, to the image of a villa in the countryside (which probably inspired the sequence set in the countryside at Bassano di Sutri), to that of a statue of Christ hanging from a helicopter. Other pictures hung on the wall were those of Anita Ekberg bathing in the Trevi fountain and that of Anthony Steel slapping his wife. Both of these pictures, taken from gossip tabloids of the time, inspired the sequence of Sylvia in the movie: the latter being the scene of Robert slapping Sylvia in front of the Excelsior Hotel, while the former, originally published by the magazine 'Tempo' in September 1958, inspired the sequence of Sylvia's and Marcello's dip in the Trevi Fountain at night.

What I would highlight is that the images hung on Fellini's wall could be interpreted as the archetypal pictures of *La dolce vita*: they are frozen fragments of the film's moving images. In light of Fellini's wall, Ricciardi's statement that *La dolce vita* should be seen as a memorial tableau of modern Rome appears even more convincing. The structure of the 'memorial tableau' seems indeed to materialize on Fellini's office wall,

²⁹ Kezich, p. 24.

which could be read as a depository of visions, images, and pictures selected from the endless flow of reality and re-assembled into this sort of visual archive. Fellini's wall proposes a system of orientation within the dilated, non-linear and anachronistic spatio-temporal dimension of late 1950s Rome. It offers legibility to the otherwise senseless and endless flow of images produced by a city which, in a few years, moved from a shattered and ruinous cityscape to a fast expanding one. If, as Kezich writes, *La dolce vita* is a film 'che sembrava annidato dappertutto e pronto a balzar fuori dalle pieghe della realtà',³⁰ then Fellini is a director-detective investigating Rome's interstices and folds.

Fellini's office wall – this archive composed of still images waiting to be put into motion – also seems to shed light on Deleuze's description of Fellini's cinematic image in terms of 'crystal image'. In fact, in his discussion of the development of the time-image in post neorealist cinema, Deleuze argued that the way in which images take shape in Fellini's films is characterized by a complex temporal procedure in which time should not be visualized as a line along which past and present progress sequentially, but as a reticulum in which they coexist with each other. Fellini himself explicitly described this aspect of his work when he stated that 'we are constructed in memory; we are simultaneously childhood, adolescence, old age and maturity'.³¹ Thus, according to Deleuze, the 'crystal' – which he considers the ur-image of Fellini's cinema – is constituted through the split of time 'in two symmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass, while the other preserves all the past'.³² The present is always haunted by images, facts and events previously deposited in the personal and collective unconscious, now suddenly coming to light again, while the past is the chaotic assemblage of these scattered images that need to be re-combined in a meaningful

³⁰ Kezich, p. 11.

³¹ Fellini, quoted in Deleuze, p. 81.

³² Deleuze, p. 72.

sequence. For this reason, Deleuze sees an intimate link between Bergson's thesis on memory – based on the idea that 'the past coexists with the present that it has been'³³ – and the temporal fabric of Fellini's cinematic image, which is 'always in the process of formation, expansion, which makes everything it touches crystallize, and to which its seeds give a capacity for indefinite growth'.³⁴

Again, it is important to reiterate the intrinsic relationship between the indefinitely endless growth of Fellini's image and the boundless dilation of Rome's cityscape. If we accept Deleuze's philosophical analysis of Fellini's cinematic image, it would not be difficult to see a correspondence between Deleuze's definition of the 'crystal image' and the pictures arranged on Fellini's office wall. Fellini's 'archival' search for images that are capable of assembling a composite picture of modern life in Rome and his 'investigative wanderings' around Rome's corners and interstices appear to be actions driven by the desire to capture and freeze snapshots from the chaotic maelstrom of Rome's modernizing and fast-expanding cityscape. The pictures arranged on his wall, as well as the sequences which compose *La dolce vita* are crystals of time of Rome's modernity, in which the unstoppable and constant flow of the present becomes past, and in which forgotten past images become suddenly visible in the present through montage.

Fellini's idea of montage responds then to the hyper-stratification and complexity of Rome's cityscape at this particular moment in time, when everything seems to change at a rate previously un-experienced. He is eager to find a system that can contain the expanding and dilating image of Rome in a moment of rapid mutation. This aspect is captured very lucidly by Ennio Flaiano, the scriptwriter of the film, who in 'I fogli di via Veneto' described 1950s Rome as:

³³ Deleuze, p. 82.

³⁴ Deleuze, p. 89.

questa ‘società del caffè’ che folleggia tra l’erotismo, l’alienazione, la noia e l’improvviso benessere. È una società che, passato lo spavento della guerra fredda e forse proprio per reazione, prospera un po’ dappertutto. Ma qui a Roma, per una mescolanza di sacro e di profano, di vecchio e di nuovo, per l’arrivo massiccio di stranieri, per il cinema, presenta caratteri più aggressivi, sub-tropicali.³⁵

As noted by Flaiano, the dynamics of the overlap between old and new, between sacred and profane – ultimately a problem of heterogeneous temporalities coexisting in the same site which updates Rome’s classical palimpsest into a modernist one – is a quintessential feature of *La dolce vita*, and one which characterizes the way in which Rome is represented throughout the film.

This aspect emerges quite clearly in the sequence of the ‘Divine Field’, when the supposed apparition of the Madonna becomes a huge media event followed by hundreds of people, journalists and television cameras. In this scene, remnants of the past and traces of modernity appear to interweave with each other. The long wait for the apparition of the Madonna – a residue of a pre-modern sense of the sacred – is juxtaposed with the obsessive and profane attention of the media to the event. In a dialogue between people questioning the truth of the apparition, a foreign woman says: ‘Ma non importa se è la Madonna sì o no [...] la vostra Italia è una terra di culti antichi e ricca di forze naturali e soprannaturali e ognuno ne sente l’influenza. Del resto chi cerca Dio lo trova dove vuole’. This statement, evoking the survival of ancient cults in contemporary times, seems then to underline the overlapping between a pre-modern and sacred temporality – represented by the desire to believe in the apparition of the Madonna – and the modern attempt to capture it through the gaze of the camera.

³⁵ Ennio Flaiano, *La solitudine del satiro* (Milan: Adelphi, 2011), p. 236. Cf. ‘I fogli di via Veneto’, pp. 235-75.



Figs. 4.15-4.16: Overlapping temporalities in the sequences of *La dolce vita*

The coexistence between pre-modern and modern temporalities is an evident feature of the last snapshot of the Divine Field sequence (fig. 4.15), which captures a field situated in the Roman countryside: this shot is itself a montage of overlapping temporalities. If the almost complete lack of urban settlements and the profile of the hills in the background suggest the idea of a location untouched by the development of urban modernity, the aerials of the energy cables, as well as the presence of television vans and of artificial lights for the recording of the scene, create a juxtaposition of natural and artificial spatial features. Similarly, the sequence which portrays Sylvia moving from Ciampino airport to the Excelsior Hotel in central Rome (fig. 4.16) records an overlapping of modern and pre-modern temporalities. It captures a snapshot of the via Appia Antica in which the luxurious modern cars of Sylvia's production company and the scooters of the photo-reporters following Sylvia clash with a flock of sheep, while in the background we can glimpse the remains of ancient Roman buildings.

To return briefly to Flaiano, the anachronistic and palimpsestal aspect of Rome's modernity can be posited as influential for the way in which the writer represents the city in 'I fogli di via Veneto': an assemblage of notes in which he tries to capture the changing aspect of via Veneto, which is the most iconic set of 1950s Rome. These notes, published in the weekly magazine *L'Europeo* in 1962, are the collected observations made by Flaiano as he wandered around the via Veneto in the decade between April 1952 and May 1962. Flaiano's notes are the written analogue of Fellini's

wall pictures, and his ‘taccuino’ is the equivalent of the director’s office wall: both try to capture images from a fleeting reality and both attempt to re-organize them in a non-chronological way, according to their combinatorial instinct. In the introduction to his ‘Fogli’ Flaiano writes:

Queste note, scritte in vari momenti, non sono qui in ordine cronologico. Quello che volevo ricordare è una strada, un film, un vecchio poeta: cose disparate che si mescolano poco chiaramente non solo nella memoria ma anche in un diario. I salti di tempo hanno dunque una loro ragione.³⁶

The road which Flaiano talks about is, of course, via Veneto, the film is *La dolce vita*, and the poet is Vincenzo Cardarelli, who in the eyes of Flaiano represented the idea of the ‘true’ artist, the one resistant to the logics of the market and the society of spectacle – a declining species in the environment of modernizing Rome. Flaiano’s notes suggest the idea that the shift to a modern society occurred sometime between the 1950s and the early 1960s. In order to capture the symptomatic images of this temporal leap, he argues for the need to break up linear chronology in favour of a discontinuous narrative, more adherent to the internal structure of memory, and based on temporal leaps kept together by montage.

The ‘Fogli di via Veneto’ not only provide us with a narrative attempt to capture the same Rome portrayed in *La dolce vita* by Fellini, but they can also help us to trace a genealogy of the fluctuating and mobile cinematic gaze which operates in Fellini’s film. In one of the notes commenting on the genesis of the film, Flaiano writes: ‘Il film avrà per titolo “La dolce vita” e non ne abbiamo scritto ancora una riga; vagamente prendiamo appunti e andiamo in giro per rinfrescarci i luoghi della memoria³⁷ – a statement which gives us the idea of a gaze constantly floating around an expanding territory and in which the chaotic assemblage of images which characterize modernizing

³⁶ Flaiano, p. 235.

³⁷ Flaiano, p. 236.

Rome have still to be re-ordered. Flaiano's descriptions of Rome certainly seem to focus on the dynamic and chaotic aspects of modern life:

In questi ultimi tempi Roma si è dilatata, distorta, arricchita. Gli scandali vi scoppiano con la violenza dei temporali d'estate, la gente vive all'aperto, si annusa, si studia, invade le trattorie, i cinema, le strade, lascia le sue automobili in quelle stesse piazze che una volta ci incantavano per il loro nitore architettonico, e che adesso sembrano garages.³⁸

This description of 1950s Rome in terms of urban dilation and sudden affluence gives us the image of a city in the maelstrom of modern changes, in which symbols of modernity such as cars occupy every free space of the city, transforming ancient squares into garages. At the same time, Flaiano's recognition of an on-going process of dilation of Rome's urbanscape, and his framing of that dynamic in terms of a clash of temporalities appear as paradigmatic features of Rome's modernizing cityscape. Flaiano's 'I fogli di via Veneto' seem successfully to capture the narrative rhythms of *La dolce vita* above all for their capacity to give shape to a non-linear account able to incorporate Rome's scattered and fleeting modern landscape, with its temporal juxtapositions, its undefined borders and its fractured map.

From a temporal perspective, what this operation seems to produce is a redefinition of the dialectic between past and present, in which sequentiality is replaced by a non-linear and discontinuous narrative. Robert Richardson has cleverly shed light on this process of decomposition, defining *La dolce vita* in terms of a 'breakdown of order', and has compared it to T. S. Eliot's poetics in *The Waste Land* (1922). For Richardson, this process is based on the rupture of the logic chain and produces a kind of modernist aesthetics which he defines as an 'aesthetic of disparity'. According to Richardson, both Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Fellini's *La dolce vita* are constructed through an anti-linear mechanism in which 'one image plays against the next, the old can be pushed

³⁸ Flaiano, p. 236.

against the new, the tender with the harsh, the lovely with the sordid'.³⁹ The image that for Richardson best captures the breakdown of order is that of a desert, which characterizes those films and novels constructed through this modernist technique of representation, such as the valley of ashes in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Michelangelo Antonioni's portrayal of the industrial landscape in *Deserto rosso* (1964), and Eliot's infernal imagery in the *Waste Land*.

However, while Richardson's definition of Fellini's aesthetics in term of 'disparity' finds confirmation in the dynamic of rejection which characterizes the visual progression of *La dolce vita*, his description of Rome's imagery as an urban desert appears to lack 'dialecticity'. While Richardson stated that the way in which Rome is represented in *La dolce vita* constitutes another piece in the mosaic of the dismembered modernist imagery, I would argue that in fact Fellini's Rome moves away from the sense of pure debasement expressed, for example, by Eliot's *Waste Land*. In the film, the breakdown of narrative is accompanied by the continuous clash and juxtaposition of a diverse and heterogeneous variety of locations, which offer us the image of a contradictory and dialectical cityscape rather than that of a wasted landscape, as in Eliot. *La dolce vita* is indeed characterized by a dynamics of disconnection in which each image, rather than simply opposing and rejecting the other as Richardson argues, seems also to attract it. The apparently paratactic and disconnected snapshots of the film function more like gravitational poles bound by a magnetic process of mutual attraction-rejection. Stretching this discourse a little further, we might attempt to visualize the pictures hung on Fellini's wall, as well as the shots which compose *La dolce vita*, as protons and electrons clashing against each other in an atomic field of tension, as they all seem to respond to a bipolar and magnetic force of continual attraction and rejection.

³⁹ Richardson, p. 111.

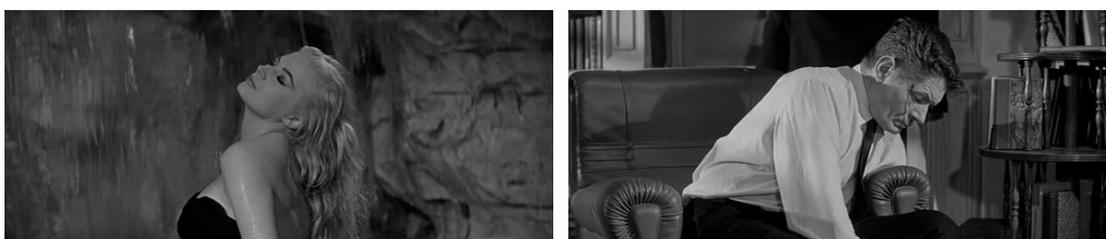
This analytical thread leads us back to Deleuze's definition of Fellini's cinematic picture through the concepts of the 'crystal-image'. As Deleuze says 'the organization of the crystal is bipolar, or rather two-sided',⁴⁰ thus hinting at the two-fold movement which lies at the core of the mechanism of visual formation of films such as *La dolce vita* or *8 1/2*. For Deleuze, the bipolar movement which constitutes the modus operandi of Fellini's cinematic image (crystal-image) is characterized by an oxymoric dynamic which he renames 'procadence': 'In fact, the selection is so complex, and the imbrication so tight, that Fellini created a word, something like "procadence", to indicate both the inexorable course of decadence and the possibility of freshness or creation which must accompany it'.⁴¹ According to Deleuze, the word 'procadence' perfectly captures the contradictory nature of Fellini's cinematic image, which is characterized by a process of continual and productive conflagration of opposites.

Expanding Deleuze's argument, I would argue that this bipolar and 'procadent' movement of contraction and dilation, of attraction and rejection, which operates at narrative and aesthetic levels in *La dolce vita*, emerges in response to the changes brought about by modernity, and in this respect it represents a modernist technique of representation of reality. As mentioned in the previous chapters, Benjamin framed modernity as a process of weakening of experience and argued about the decline of the 'aura' of the artistic object, as a consequence of the hyper-stimulation of life in the metropolis and of the technological progresses implemented by the logic of modernity. De Certeau attempted to visualize this trajectory with the image of Icarus falling from the World Trade Center in New York. For him, like a falling Icarus, the gaze of the modern man is continuously falling, from the heights of a skyscraper to the depths of New York's streets. However, despite their apparent negativity, both Benjamin and de Certeau underlined the contradictory and dialectical energetic charge triggered by this

⁴⁰ Deleuze, p. 90.

⁴¹ Deleuze, p. 91.

downward movement in a way not dissimilar from Fellini's concept of 'procadence'. For Benjamin, if on the one hand our ability to experience was weakened and the light of the artistic aura lowered in the modern age of technological reproduction, on the other hand the continuous stimulation of the senses that people undergo in modern life opened up the possibility of giving new legibility to the massive series of images floating around the modern metropolis.⁴² For de Certeau, if the lowering of the gaze made it impossible for the modern man to get a 'complete' picture of the world which surrounds him, it also allowed him to focus more clearly on particularities and details.⁴³



Figs. 4.17-4.18: Sylvia's bath in the Trevi Fountain and Steiner's suicide: 'procadent' images of modern Rome

In a similar way, Deleuze's description of Fellini's cinematic image with the term 'procadence', underlines a process of degeneration and fall which dialectically triggers a movement of reaction. This oppositional and bipolar dynamic clearly materializes in the trajectory undertaken by all the main characters of the film, which sees at its opposite ends the figures of Steiner and Sylvia. In Fellini's film, Sylvia symbolizes the pure essence of the society of spectacle in its lightness and fulgent superficiality, while Steiner represents its opposite: he is a sophisticated man of letters, all profundity and abstraction. If the snapshot of Sylvia bathing in the Trevi Fountain represents the brightest and lightest moment of the film, that of the dead Steiner leaning in his chair is

⁴² See Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. For an interesting discussion of the notion of the aura in Benjamin see Peter Zusi, 'Vanishing Points: Walter Benjamin and Karel Teige on the Liquidations of the Aura', *Modern Language Review*, 108.2 (2013), 369-97.

⁴³ See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), in particular the chapter 'Walking in the City', pp. 91-110.

its darkest image. While the explosive lightness and shallowness of Sylvia perfectly moulds into the dynamics of the glamorous society captured by Fellini's camera, the image of Steiner reclined in his armchair with a trickle of dry blood on his forehead represents an act of rejection of that world. His suicide symbolizes his radical rejection of the glittering light of the society of spectacle which Sylvia perfectly embodies, and for this reason he could be read as a victim of the temporal disarticulation which characterizes Rome's modernity. He cannot find a balance between the two clashing temporalities and ultimately falls into the interstice which separates them.

If Sylvia and Steiner sit at opposite poles, Marcello is caught between her superficial magnificence and his tragic profundity. He is attracted by both Sylvia and Steiner, but he cannot be or possess either of them. The famous scene of Marcello and Sylvia bathing in the Trevi Fountain is almost immediately followed by that of Marcello chasing Steiner into the church of San Giovanni Bosco: the sensuality of the first scene is counteracted by the spirituality of the second, but Marcello remains an observer of both events. He can only watch Sylvia while she loses herself into an experience of ecstatic baroque sensation, and he can only listen astonished to Steiner while he plays Bach, absorbed in the profound sensations of the moment.

4.4. Conclusions: Temporal Dislocations. Fellini's and Warburg's Modernist Tableaux

The concept of 'procadence', with its disruptive charge and its ability to reconfigure sets of relations, seems to drive us back to an idea of modernity as a 'disarticulated' notion in which heterogeneous temporalities and spatialities overlap. Deleuze's definition of Fellini's cinematic image in terms of 'procadence' seems indeed to intersect with the analysis of the concept of modernity developed by the group of Italian

intellectuals gravitating around *Nuovi argomenti*, above all with that of Ernesto de Martino. In Deleuze's description of Fellini's 'procadent' image, which focuses on the splits of time into 'two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past',⁴⁴ one could indeed recognize echoes of de Martino's concept of disarticulation of the temporal dialectic, in which '[l]'ombra del passato che non è stato fatto passare si distende sul progresso del fare, spia l'occasione per riproporsi'.⁴⁵

As both Deleuze's and de Martino's statements suggest, a process of breaking up of temporal linearity characterizes the investigation of time and history in modernity. This aspect, which was first recognized by Henri Bergson in *Matter and Memory* at the beginning of the twentieth century,⁴⁶ and then by Walter Benjamin in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History',⁴⁷ appears also to inform intellectual and artistic debates in the modernizing Italy of the 1950s and 1960s. In light of this, we could interpret the disarticulated, paratactic and fragmented way in which Fellini's *La dolce vita* stages historical time as a response to the dynamics of fragmentation generated by the advancement of modernity. The trajectory of fall followed by Steiner and Marcello, but also by Emma and Maddalena, seems indeed to stem precisely from the presence of an interstice caused by the temporal disarticulation which characterizes time and space in modernity.

In this respect, Fellini's *La dolce vita* appears to belong to the same constellation of Aby Warburg's atlas of images, *Mnemosyne* (1929), as they both seem to deconstruct linear ways of representing their object of investigation – for Warburg the survival of ancient patterns of representation of human expression in modern visual culture; for

⁴⁴ Deleuze, p. 81.

⁴⁵ Ernesto de Martino, 'Perdita della presenza', p. 50.

⁴⁶ See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

⁴⁷ Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, pp. 253-64.

Fellini, Rome's modernity in the late 1950s – through a methodology of representation based on the accumulation and re-organization of fragments.⁴⁸ Despite their different aims and objectives and their distinct fields of work, Fellini and Warburg seem to respond to the chaotic and accumulative progression of time – the accelerated time of modernity – through the creation of a system that is able to incorporate the returns, the anachronisms and the discontinuities of history. In this system, each meaningful snapshot taken from the heterogeneous assemblage of history has to be re-organized next to the others according to a shared index, a similar marker which activates a bipolar dynamics of attraction and rejection, resemblance and dissimilarity.⁴⁹

The methodology of composition adopted in their works, and above all the priority given to visual images, seems to suggest the possibility of tracing a line of correspondence between Fellini's *La dolce vita* and Warburg's *Mnemosyne* project. The *Mnemosyne* project was conceived by Warburg as an atlas in which he aimed to rearrange a vast and heterogeneous series of pictures representing ancient sculptures, frescoes, paintings, newspaper clippings, stamps and press photos. The project occupied the last five years of Warburg's life, from around 1924 to 1929, and his aim was that of combining and cataloguing these images in thematic series according to their relationship of similarity in order to illustrate the movements of human expressions throughout history. As Giorgio Agamben has argued, Warburg's atlas 'era un gigantesco condensatore in cui si raccoglievano tutte le correnti energetiche che avevano animato e ancora continuavano ad animare la memoria dell'Europa, prendendo corpo nei suoi "fantasmi"'.⁵⁰ What differentiated Warburg's project from apparently

⁴⁸ For an analysis of the relationship between Warburg's work and cinema see Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

⁴⁹ In light of this, a strict and intimate marker appears to link together Warburg's notion of *pathosformel*, Benjamin's notion of 'dialectical image' and Fellini's 'procadent' image: these three concepts are indeed based on the idea of the clash of opposites which, differently from Hegel's idea of dialectic, never finds a synthesis but keep coexisting together in their singularities, as in a field of tension.

⁵⁰ Giorgio Agamben, 'Aby Warburg e la scienza senza nome', in *La potenza del pensiero* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2005), pp. 127-52 (p. 136).

similar art historical albums was its open form as well as the anti-chronological methodology of combination between the images: Warburg constantly re-arranged the pictures of his atlas moving away from a uni-linear system towards a 'diagrammatic form'.⁵¹ In the series of the nymph, for example, the picture of the fourth century BCE bas-relief of the Gradyva could be placed next to a picture representing Domenico Ghirlandaio's swirling female figure in 'Birth of Saint John Baptist' (1486-90), or to a portrait of a contemporary golf player. This arrangement offered the possibility of giving new readability to the pictures, as one shed a new light on the other, and of finding out new iconographic themes, such as that of the nymph itself. As Gombrich said 'it was the philosophy of "bipolarity" in particular which Warburg was testing and developing in these kaleidoscopic permutations'.⁵²

The connections between Warburg's *Mnemosyne* and Fellini's *La dolce vita* seem to lie in their application of a montage technique based on a bipolar combinatorial methodology. The wall of Fellini's office and the wall of Warburg's library in Hamburg – the place where he initially displayed the plates of his atlas – appear to be haunted by the same anti-linear idea of time and space, as they are both constructed through a bipolar dynamic of attraction and rejection. In this respect, Georges Didi-Huberman's analysis of Warburg's notion of montage could be also read as a commentary of Fellini's way of assembling shots in *La dolce vita*:

Il montaggio [...] non è la creazione ingannevole di una continuità temporale a partire da 'piani' discontinui disposti in sequenze. È, piuttosto, un modo di *dispiegare visivamente le discontinuità del tempo* all'opera in ogni sequenza della storia. Ogni montaggio all'opera in *Mnemosyne* fa emergere, mi sembra, questo genere di paradossi: le disparità manifeste sono quasi sempre le marche di legami latenti, e le omologie manifeste sono quasi sempre le marche di antinomie latenti. 'Montare immagini', qui, non deriva da un artificio narrativo per unificare i

⁵¹ See Ernst H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986): 'Warburg had been fond of mapping out these complex relationship in diagrammatic form in which the work he was studying was represented as an outcome of various forces' (p. 286).

⁵² Gombrich, p. 285.

fenomeni sparsi ma, al contrario, rappresenta uno strumento dialettico in cui si scinde l'unità apparente delle tradizioni figurative.⁵³

For Didi-Huberman, Warburg's montage is the most apt methodology for capturing the moving image, because it responds to the discontinuous nature of historical time by visually displaying it. The technique of montage at work in *Mnemosyne* relies indeed on a dialectical system in which the disparities between one image and the other usually work as markers of concealed links between them, and, conversely, the apparent similarities are often markers of unnoticed dissimilarities. As we have seen, a similar idea of montage animates the sequences of *La dolce vita*, based on a principle of 'structural discontinuity'⁵⁴ and of 'disparity' between the images.⁵⁵ The bipolar opposition which gives shape to the unraveling of facts and events in Fellini's tableau – the relationship between Marcello and Steiner, the duality between Emma and Maddalena, and the dialectical coexistence between ancient and modern in Rome – seems then to operate, at the level of the cognitive exploration of time and reality, in a very similar way to that which pieces together the images assembled in Warburg's atlas.

The feeling of going through a period of fast development led Fellini to realize the impossibility of capturing Rome in a unitary way, and brought him to fragment the big picture of Rome into small snapshots. These pictures, which started off as still images hung up and re-composed in ever new series on his office wall, stand out as synecdochical images of Rome's modernity, as they capture the movement of disarticulation and fracture produced by modernity while it is still an on-going process. The emergence of these porous, osmotic and expanding 'vernacular' images which characterizes Rome's modern cityscape; the discontinuous, non-linear, paratactic aesthetics at work in Fellini's film as well as in Flaiano's prose; the revision of the

⁵³ Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'immagine insepolta: Aby Warburg, la memoria dei fantasmi e la storia dell'arte*, trans. by Alessandro Serra (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2006), p. 436.

⁵⁴ See Burke, p. 113.

⁵⁵ See Richardson, p. 111.

montage technique in terms of a dialectical and 'procadent' mechanism in which each snapshot seems to be bound to the other by a bipolar opposition of attraction-rejection – all these elements seem to suggest the emergence of a new modality of exploration of the flowing real, based on an equally new, anachronistic conception of historical time.

5. Visual Coagulations: Pasolini's Contradictory Strategy of Seeing in 1950s Rome

*Nulla muore mai in una vita.
Tutto sopravvive. Noi, insieme
viviamo e sopravviviamo. Così
anche ogni cultura è sempre
intessuta di sopravvivenze.*
Pier Paolo Pasolini

While Fellini drove all over the city in search of inspiration for *La dolce vita*, Pasolini's journeys around Rome had a more specific objective: the most isolated of its peripheries. In his explorations, Pasolini was equipped with a notepad in which he recorded, in an almost ethnographical fashion, all the new words and expressions that he learned from the people living in these areas. At times Pasolini and Fellini explored Rome's urban margins together, meanwhile discussing various films, novels and problems of aesthetics. Pasolini recalls these trips in his article 'Nota sulle *Notti*':

Ricorderò sempre la mattinata in cui ho conosciuto Fellini: mattinata 'favolosa', secondo la sua 'punta' linguistica più frequente. Siamo partiti con la sua macchina, massiccia e molle, ubriaca e esattissima (come lui), da piazza del Popolo, e di strada in strada siamo arrivati in campagna: era la Flaminia? l'Aurelia? la Cassia? L'unica cosa fisicamente certa era che si trattava di campagna, con strade asfaltate, benzinari, qualche casale, qualche ragazzo un po' burino in bicicletta, e una immensa guaina verde, imbevuta di sole e ancora freddo, che rivestiva tutto.¹

Pasolini's description of his first meeting with Fellini in 1957 is particularly interesting not only as a document of their early collaboration but moreover as an account of their emotional and intellectual relationship with Rome. As Pasolini recalls, the work of both men was deeply dependent on the city; however, though they were both 'wanderers' of Rome, their strategies of movement varied substantially. While Fellini moved around

¹ Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Nota su *Le notti*' (1957), in *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), I, pp. 699-707 (p. 699).

the city simply following his instinct and his ‘realismo creaturale’,² Pasolini’s movement reflected his willingness and desire to understand and analyse the living conditions of the most marginalized social classes. Thus, while Fellini’s fluctuating gaze on the city allows us to capture the cohabitations of heterogeneous elements in Rome’s expanding cityscape, Pasolini’s portrayal of Rome helps us to enter into the city’s most marginal and peripheral interstices and to detect the dynamics of exclusion at work in Rome’s peripheries – the so-called ‘borgate’.

This chapter focuses on Pasolini’s depiction of Rome in his 1950s writings and is divided into two parts. The first focuses on the way in which Rome’s image takes shape in Pasolini’s writings, in order to shed new light on the ambivalent nature of Rome as a site of modernity and modernism. The second part is a theoretical study of the political value of Pasolini’s depiction of Rome’s periphery, which frames the writer’s representation of the ‘borgata’ as an emblematic space in order to capture the discontents provoked by Italy’s postwar modernization. For this reason, I propose a reading of the ‘borgata’ which underlines the correlations between Pasolini and a specific group of thinkers, including Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault, who have investigated the dynamic of exclusion generated by the advance of modernity.³

5.1. Pasolini in Rome: The Discovery of History

In 1950 Pasolini moved from Casarsa, his Northern Italian hometown, to Rome. For him this move from provincial Friuli to the Italian capital corresponded to a materialist

² Pasolini, ‘Nota su *Le notti*’, p. 706.

³ Here I am referring especially to Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995); Giorgio Agamben, *Quel che resta di Auschwitz: l’archivio e il testimone* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998); Giorgio Agamben, *Stato di eccezione* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1973); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79*, trans. by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

contact with history. While Friuli left the writer somewhat isolated, Rome allowed him to enter into contact with the material reality of modernized Italy. In a 1957 interview with Elio Filippo Accrocca, the author explained how Rome had provided him with the historical perspective necessary to experience, analyse and bear witness to the reality of his own time:

Roma nella mia narrativa ha quella fondamentale importanza di cui parlavo prima, in quanto violento trauma e violenta carica di vitalità, cioè esperienza di un mondo e quindi in un certo senso del mondo. Nella mia narrativa Roma è stata la protagonista diretta non solo come oggetto di descrizione o di analisi ma proprio come spinta, come dinamica, come necessità testimoniale.⁴

The violent shock that Pasolini addresses here stems from his discovery of the degraded and squalid areas built by the urban planners of the fascist regime outside the city limits, and of that excluded social class who lived in the shacks of the abandoned periphery (whom he would come to rename the 'ragazzi di vita'). These areas of Rome represented for Pasolini a traumatic and at the same time energetic discovery that inspired him to create a testimony of their almost unknown reality. In other words, it was a mixture of shock, wonder and the need to witness that pushed the writer to textualize, in a series of articles, novels and poems, the actuality of this submerged world.⁵

Rome resonates within Pasolini's earliest writings from the city. When he moved there in January 1950 (the same year in which Levi's *L'orologio* was published), the city was undergoing a period of reconstruction after the devastation of the war, and the general feeling was one of hope for a better future. His first letters from the city express a sense of enthusiasm and wonder: 'Roma si distende intorno a me, come anch'essa fosse disegnata nel vuoto ma tuttavia ha un forte potere consolatorio: e io mi immergo

⁴ Pasolini quoted in Francesco Muzzioli, *Come leggere 'Ragazzi di vita' di Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Milan: Mursia, 1975), pp. 15-16.

⁵ For a discussion of Pasolini's poetic engagement with history see Robert S. C. Gordon, *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 114-37.

nei suoi rumori senza così sentire le mie note stonate'.⁶ This description of the city, written in February 1950 to Silvana Mauri, is Pasolini's first recorded description of Rome. Here the city is depicted as a presence which engulfs the poet with its noises, distracting him from the sorrow caused by his dramatic flight from Friuli to Rome.⁷ The use of a word like 'distendersi', already points to a vast and indefinite space which counts more as background than as foreground.

However, this sense of solace and the immateriality of Rome's atmosphere were soon to be accompanied by a more critical perspective. In a letter written in the summer of 1952, while Pasolini continued to describe Rome as an energetic and dynamic place, his impressions were accompanied by the mention of a specific location of the city, its periphery: 'Roma, cinta dal suo inferno di borgate, è in questi giorni stupenda: la fissità, così disadorna, del calore è quello che ci vuole per avvilitare un poco i suoi eccessi, per denudarla e mostrarla quindi nelle sue forme più alte'.⁸ In this letter, Pasolini uses for the first time the word 'borgata', and the appearance of this term demonstrates the author's ambivalence towards this location. He expresses a feeling of impassioned participation in the energetic charge of the 'borgata'; yet simultaneously he describes it extremely negatively, as an 'inferno'. This description allows us to glimpse immediately some of the aspects of Rome's periphery which later became essential features of Pasolini's aesthetic: the excesses of the periphery, its heat, and above all its roughness and sense of 'unadorned fixity'.⁹

Pasolini's inspiration to explore further these locations came from these feelings of amazement and horror, as well as from the sexual attraction of the lower classes that

⁶ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Lettere 1940-1955*, ed. by Nico Naldini (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), p. 400.

⁷ In 1950, as a consequence of a sexual scandal which occurred in Casarsa, his hometown in Friuli, Pasolini and his mother moved to Rome.

⁸ Pasolini, *Lettere 1940-1955*, pp. 490-1.

⁹ The dialectical coexistence of sublime and degraded elements in Pasolini's Rome is the main theme of John David Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City: Pasolini's Rome* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2007).

inhabited the periphery, and from the ideological desire to study and immerse himself in their ways of living. These were the years of his apprenticeship, in which he undertook a social and anthropological discovery of a territory located at the very margins of Rome and unknown to most. In this period, Pasolini spent all his free time in places like Rebibbia, the Tiburtino, Gordiani or Pietralata, those areas where new penniless immigrants settled once they had arrived in the Italian capital. Pasolini discovered a huge suburban landscape that consisted of a sector of the population placed outside the borders of the ‘Eternal City’ and very far from the social and economic dynamics of the bourgeoisie. The world of the borgate had little, almost nothing to do with the postcard image of Rome that had been transmitted throughout the centuries; Pasolini’s aim became that of redesigning the geography of the city by including these territories into its literary (and later cinematic) cartography.

We can find evidence of Pasolini’s trips to the peripheries in a series of articles and short stories written in the early 1950s, which were eventually published partly in the volume *Alì dagli occhi azzurri* (1965), and partly in *Storie della città di Dio* (1995).¹⁰ The article ‘Il fronte della città’ (1958) depicts Rome’s peripheries, at the same time capturing the contradictory aspect of Rome’s rapidly modernizing urban landscape.¹¹ Here, the author challenges any pre-conceptions of the city by asking himself ‘Cos’è Roma? Qual è Roma? Dove finisce e dove comincia Roma?’, and answering, ‘Roma sicuramente è la più bella città d’Italia – se non del mondo. Ma è anche la più brutta, la più accogliente, la più drammatica, la più ricca, la più miserabile’.¹² The ambivalence of this description, which is based on the dialectical coexistence of opposite elements in the same space, is emblematic of Pasolini’s representations of the city. The description

¹⁰ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Alì dagli occhi azzurri*, in *Romanzi e racconti*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), II, pp. 389-890; Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Storie della città di Dio, racconti e cronache romane 1950-1966*, ed. by Walter Siti (Turin: Einaudi, 1995).

¹¹ Pier Paolo Pasolini, ‘Il fronte della città’, in *Romanzi e racconti*, I, pp. 1454-58.

¹² Pasolini, ‘Il fronte della città’, p. 1455.

of Rome as both beautiful and ugly, welcoming and miserable, relies on a strategy of contradiction based on the oxymoron, or even better, on what Franco Fortini named ‘sineciosi’, which represents a structural element of Pasolini’s poetics and *Weltanschauung*. I wish to suggest that it is Rome which directly informs and shapes this aspect of the author’s philosophy, one of the most widely discussed elements of his work.¹³

Pasolini’s article continues with a further discussion of the meaning and the effects of Rome’s contradictions, through an analysis of postwar neorealist films, which Pasolini praises for providing people with a visual knowledge of contemporary Rome. As he writes, ‘Il cinema ha molto aiutato a farla conoscere a chi non ci vive’.¹⁴ However, he also warns of neorealism’s limitations in representing Rome:

il gusto neorealistico che ha presieduto i film su Roma è troppo imbevuto di bozzettismo, di particolarismo dialettale, di ottimismo umanitario, di crepuscolarismo: tutte cose che non potranno mai dare, col loro tono medio, grigio o roseo, l’atmosfera di questa città che è così *drammaticamente contraddittoria*. Le contraddizioni di Roma sono difficili a superarsi perché sono contraddizioni di genere esistenziale: più che termini di una contraddizione, la ricchezza e la miseria, la felicità e l’orrore di Roma, son parti di un magma, di un caos.¹⁵

For Pasolini, the neorealist films have failed in their representation of Rome, insofar as their humanitarian optimism and ‘bozzettismo’ are characteristics which offer a stereotyped image of the city and ultimately restrict the possibilities of reading its complexities. For him, Rome is chaotic rather than picturesque, ‘magmatica’ rather than ‘bozzettistica’. In this polemical attack on neorealism, which Rhodes has interestingly defined in terms of an ‘Oedipal complex’,¹⁶ we can grasp Pasolini’s attempt to move away from the neorealist image of Rome, towards his own representation of the city. In

¹³ Franco Fortini, *Attraverso Pasolini* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), pp. 21-37. More recently, the theme of contradiction has received renewed attention in Pasolini studies; see in particular Luca Di Blasi, Manuele Gagnolati and Christoph F. E. Holzey (eds), *The Scandal of Self-Contradiction: Pasolini’s Multistable Subjectivities, Traditions, Geographies* (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2012).

¹⁴ Pasolini, ‘Il fronte della città’, p. 1455.

¹⁵ Pasolini, ‘Il fronte della città’, p. 1455 [my emphasis].

¹⁶ See Rhodes, p. 60.

particular, his definition of peripheral Rome as both beautiful and ugly goes far beyond traditionalist, dichotomic readings of the city, which describe its historical remnants and monuments as sublime and its modern peripheries as degraded. For Pasolini, Rome should be understood as a dialectical entity in which the degraded and the sublime are strictly intertwined.

‘Il fronte della città’ furthermore reveals Pasolini’s difficulty in narrating a city which is undergoing rapid expansion: ‘non è facile dare ordine a questo caos’.¹⁷ Towards the end of the article, he takes a snapshot of Rome, which we can now read as paradigmatic of its image at this historical moment. Pasolini’s gaze focuses on ‘frammenti di villaggi di tuguri, distese di casette da città beduina, frane sgangherate di palazzoni e di cinema sfarzosi, ex casali incastrati tra grattacieli, dighe di pareti altissime e vicoletti fangosi, vuoti improvvisi in cui ricompaiono sterri e prati con qualche gregge sparso intorno’.¹⁸ As this description makes clear, Pasolini’s way of seeing Rome escapes structure and linearity: Rome is a boundless and fractured territory where ‘buildings and forms fail [...] to cohere as an image’,¹⁹ and where surviving and anachronistic traces from past temporalities coexist with the city’s most modern elements.

5.2. Fragmented Views and Visual Coagulations: Pasolini’s ‘Roman’ Modernism

This aspect of Pasolini’s gaze opens up the possibility of interpreting his style in modernist terms, in that his aesthetic appears firmly linked to his desire to capture the shifting image stemming from Rome’s fast changing urban body. As Rhodes argues in *Stupendous, Miserable City*, Pasolini’s gaze on Rome and his aesthetics constitute a complex attempt to move beyond the dichotomy of realism versus modernism, by

¹⁷ Pasolini, ‘Il fronte della città’, p. 1455.

¹⁸ Pasolini, ‘Il fronte della città’, p. 1455.

¹⁹ Rhodes, p. 55.

fusing them.²⁰ Contrary to such a classic dichotomy, Pasolini's aesthetics represent a version of modernism which experimentally incorporates realistic observations. Thus, Pasolini's poetry is characterized by a form of 'poetic syncretism' which organizes reality by integrating tradition (the 'terzina dantesca' and the ancient layers of historical Rome) with modernity (the loose and casual syntax and the miserable and dusty hovels of Rome's periphery).²¹ His Roman cinema, too, captures this modernism through realistic images of the dilating and swollen urbanscape that are caught in poetic, symbolic long takes.

I propose to stretch this intuition a little further, in order to understand the way in which Rome's image, both optically and haptically, forms itself in Pasolini's eye. In doing so, I will begin with Rhodes's description of modern Rome as incapable of cohering as an image. What I would argue is that Pasolini's modernism – poetic, narrative and filmic – originates precisely as a challenge to the impossibility of capturing the simultaneously modernized and pre-modern cityscape in any comprehensive way. As we have seen, Rome's inability to form itself as a total image is a consequence of its progressive and uncontrolled expansion and of its quintessentially multi-layered historical structure. In order to overcome such a challenge, Pasolini captures Rome through an uninterrupted series of observations which combine detailed close-ups and broad long-shots. As he writes, '[I]o spettacolo visivo è così assillante, grandioso, senza soluzione di continuità, che pare di poter risolvere tutto, intuitivamente, in una serie ininterrotta di osservazioni: di inquadrature, verrebbe voglia di dire, da una infinità di primi piani particolarissimi, a un'infinità di panoramiche sconfinite'.²² In fact, we could easily expand this description, reading it as an ur-image of Pasolini's descriptions of Rome. The way in which Rome's unknowable and dilating

²⁰ See Rhodes, p. 55.

²¹ See Rhodes, p. 76.

²² Pasolini, 'Il fronte della città', p. 1456.

cityscape floods Pasolini's eye, through its clots of violent light, its degraded shacks, its dusty streets and bucolic countryside, constitutes the backbone of Pasolini's modernist aesthetics. As these comments suggest, for Pasolini – as for Levi and Fellini – Rome constitutes the foundation of his understanding of modernity.

Pasolini's Rome is an auratic entity and a multistable surface in which heterogeneous temporalities intersect and coexist with a multi-layered and porous spatiality, and in which opposing forces cohabit. In this respect, it seems to match perfectly Marshall Berman's description of modernity as a spatio-temporal system in which 'everything is pregnant with its contrary',²³ in that we are poured 'into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish'.²⁴ In Pasolini, the centrifugal force generated by the advance of modernity appears to have disintegrated the universal, coherent, 'postcard' image of Rome which had animated the dreams of Italian politicians from the unification period to fascism (from Quintino Sella to Mussolini). In order to respond to the challenge of the city's modernity, Pasolini's suggestion is to revolutionize our view of Rome, to turn our back on the 'Eternal City' and to direct our gaze to the city's most hidden margins. Thus, topographically Pasolini argues that the city should be read through the lens of the periphery, rather than the centre, while aesthetically he aims to dissolve the idea of the total picture, in order to acquire a plural gaze that shifts from the panoramic to the fragmented.

As exemplified in 'Il fronte della città', Pasolini captures a series of images and fragmented snapshots which drastically broaden the city's semantic meaning, thus allowing us to glimpse its modern expansion. Such a strategy of seeing characterizes all the short stories collected in *Ali dagli occhi azzurri*, as well as his novels *Ragazzi di vita*

²³ Marshall Berman, *All that Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 23.

²⁴ Berman, p. 15.

(1955) and *Una vita violenta* (1959).²⁵ In ‘Squarci di notti romane’ (1950), for example, Rome has momentarily lost any historical materiality and is now ‘tutta moderna, quotidiana, pezzente e di una attualità che brucia come una fiamma ossidrica a una velocità vorticosa’.²⁶ The process of modernization, of which the ‘borgata’ embodies the most paradigmatic (and exceptional) representative space, opens up a new temporal dimension which destroys any idea of eternity linked to Rome’s historical heritage. 1950s Rome is a city which ‘ha passato al setaccio degli istanti, precipitato nel movimento bergsoniano, trovato il modo di diventare sempre più normale’.²⁷ Similarly, in ‘Notte sull’ES’, Rome is described as ‘la città più nuova del mondo’.²⁸ These descriptions demonstrate Pasolini’s attempt to try to revolutionize the semantic meaning of the signifier ‘Rome’. For him, it is first of all a city where modern forms, attitudes and behaviours take shape and take place.

What seems striking in Pasolini’s representation of Rome is the way in which the city’s image forms: ‘L’informe, festiva, sanguinaria psicologia prende forme visive: si coagula nei suoi equivalenti poetici, nelle immagini’.²⁹ Rome’s shapes and contours, and its inhabitants’ movements and attitudes coagulate (‘coagulano’) within the author’s gaze. Coagulation (‘coagulazione’) represents an important key-word for understanding the process of formation of Pasolini’s aesthetics, in that it perfectly captures the way in which smells, lights, buildings and bodies materialize in his writing, through a process of thickening and clotting.

Such a process characterizes Pasolini’s first Roman novel, *Ragazzi di vita*, which captures snapshots of life scenes of subaltern classes living in the borgate. Though they are physically divided from the city centre in a politics of space that reflects the

²⁵ See Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Ragazzi di vita*, in *Romanzi e racconti*, I, pp. 523-774; and Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Una vita violenta*, in *Romanzi e racconti*, I, pp. 823-1196.

²⁶ Pier Paolo Pasolini, ‘Squarci di notti romane’, in *Romanzi e racconti*, II, pp. 329-61 (p. 332).

²⁷ Pasolini, ‘Squarci di notti romane’, p. 349.

²⁸ Pier Paolo Pasolini, ‘Notte sull’ES’, in *Romanzi e racconti*, II, pp. 395-411 (p. 400).

²⁹ Pasolini, ‘Notte sull’ES’, p. 405.

authoritarian power of that society, that same power seems initially unable to contain the vitality expressed by the ‘ragazzi di vita’. Rome’s periphery appears in the novel as a swarming place, characterized by dynamic energy:

Tutto un grande accerchiamento intorno a Roma, tra Roma e le campagne intorno, con centinaia di vite umane che brulicavano tra i loro lotti, le loro casette di sfrattati o i loro grattacieli. E tutta quella vita, non c’era solo nelle borgate della periferia, ma pure dentro Roma, nel centro della città, magari sotto il Cupolone, che bastava mettere il naso fuori dal colonnato di Piazza San Pietro, verso Porta Cavalleggeri, e eccheli lli, a gridare, a prendere d’aceto, a sfottere in bande e in ghenghe intorno ai cinemetti, alle pizzerie.³⁰

Despite its geographical subordination, it is the Roman periphery which offers privileged images of the city’s modernity. In this description, the Tiburtino area is flooded with people who constitute a non-distinguishable crowd, not dissimilar to that of Poe’s London or Baudelaire’s Paris during the nineteenth century. Rome’s periphery is a crumbling space full of broken pavements and dirty hovels.

As previously noted, these vivid scenes which depict the liveliness of Rome’s peripheries often overlap with descriptions that underline the sordid aspects of the same areas. In the second chapter of *Ragazzi di vita*, Pasolini describes the ‘Grattacieli’ area, a specific location in the peripheral area of Monteverde Nuovo:

Marcello [...] abitava ai Grattacieli un po’ più avanti: grandi come catene di montagne, con migliaia di finestre, in fila, in cerchi, in diagonali, sulle strade, sui cortili, sulle scalette, a nord, a sud, in pieno sole, in ombra, chiuse o spalancate, vuote o sventolanti di bucati, silenziose o piene della caciara delle donne o delle lagne dei ragazzini. Tutt’intorno si stendevano ancora prati abbandonati, pieni di gobbe e monticelli, zeppi di creature che giocavano coi zinalini sporchi di moccio o mezzi nudi.³¹

Because of the enormous scale of the ‘Grattacieli’, the narrator compares these buildings to mountains. They are also described as impersonal cages which restrain the exuberance of the people who inhabit them, and the cityscape around them looks like a

³⁰ Pasolini, ‘Ragazzi di vita’, p. 707.

³¹ Pasolini, ‘Ragazzi di vita’, pp. 564-65.

no-man's-land of abandoned fields in which dirty and half-naked children play together. The sense of degradation and squalor offered by this description, when compared, for example, to the previous, enlivening image of the city, suggests a dialectical vision of the capital in which 'everything is pregnant of its contrary'.³²

Pasolini's second novel, *Una vita violenta*, also focuses on postwar Rome. These two novels should in fact be considered a diptych in which the former offers an overture to the latter. But while *Ragazzi di vita* is an assemblage of stories kept together by the character of Riccetto, in *Una vita violenta* the author focuses more specifically on the life of one Roman boy, Tommaso Pezzulli, aiming to show his transition from youth to adulthood. The book could be considered a catalogue of figures and descriptions of a Rome that is quickly changing its features. The gaze of the author captures a repertoire of different human types such as the prostitute, the homosexual man, the lower-class boy, the hysterical mother and the working father. At the same time, it focuses on changes in the urban landscape, offering overlapping snapshots of a city full of cranes and construction sites. In such a scenery, Pasolini interprets the construction of the INA-Casa buildings as an important agent of change in the cityscape of postwar Rome. The chapter 'Puzza di libertà' depicts the housing complex in the Tiburtino area where Tommaso and his family live:

Era una delle ultime strade dell'INA Case: arrivava in curva verso i prati, tutti ondulati e bruciati sotto il sole. C'erano sei o sette palazzine, storte, di sguincio, con file di finestri tondi, dipinte di rosa scuro, con delle porte dove ci s'arrivava facendo cinque o sei scalini, e tante balaustre a zig zag che le univano fra loro: poi dietro a queste la strada finiva di colpo, contro un'altra strada, senza case, tagliata nel tufo. E tutt'intorno i prati. Più in giù c'era un vecchio cascinale con delle querce, e, dall'altra parte verso la borgata, isolata in uno spiazzetto, c'era una chiesa di legno, piccoletta, con intorno una rete metallica.³³

³² Berman, p. 22.

³³ Pasolini, 'Una vita violenta', p. 1014.

This description underlines two important aspects of the postwar development of the city. Firstly, it highlights the uniformity of new constructions: the six or seven buildings look identical, all painted in pink and with the same round windows and stairways. This kind of architecture signals the continuation, at that time, of a pan-Italian style that drew directly on the universal language of the rationalist movement. Secondly, Pasolini's passage emphasizes the contrast between this utopian ideal of uniformity and the scrambled, unsystematic landscape in which the buildings were located. As already noted, Pasolini's descriptions of Rome's 1950s periphery seem characterized by the coexistence of informal and spontaneous buildings (the old 'borgata'), and of a modernist location such as the new periphery. Mussolini's desire to build a new Rome through the symbolic reinterpretation of the Imperial city, which materialized in places such as via dell'Impero, via della Conciliazione, the Foro Italico and Piazza Augusto Imperatore, led to the emergence of new urban spaces located outside the walls of the historical city, where regular and irregular borgate had been built. In the 1950s, the modernizing project pursued by the Christian Democrats, of which the INA-Casa plan can be considered emblematic, led to the formation of a new, immense periphery, characterized by uniformity and anonymity.

Pasolini's dialectical vision of the Roman periphery can be fruitfully compared to Marshall Berman's definition of the 1950s as 'the Expressway World'. In the last chapter of *All that Is Solid Melts into Air*, Berman analyzes the figure of Robert Moses, the 'Master Planner' of twentieth-century New York, describing him as 'the last in a long line of titanic builders and destroyers,' comparable to Baron Haussmann, Louis XIV or Joseph Stalin.³⁴ Moses was the quintessential modernist urban planner who designed some of the most important of New York City's public works from the 1930s until the 1960s. In addition to planning the Triborough Bridge, the Brooklyn Battery

³⁴ Berman, p. 294.

Bridge and the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, he was also the man who made the Bronx the model of twentieth-century urban dystopia. According to Berman, the main reason behind the decadence of this now infamous neighbourhood followed Moses's decision to build the Cross-Bronx Expressway, New York's biggest freeway which runs through the whole Bronx for more than ten miles, connecting Manhattan to Long Island. This freeway was constructed within very densely populated areas of the Bronx and led to the evacuation of something like sixty thousand people from their homes, destroying entire blocks and streets where people lived and shared their life experiences. For Berman, Moses's urban plans indicate a broader process of the institutionalization of modernity 'into a system of grim, inexorable necessities and crushing routines',³⁵ which caused a split between the modern human spirit and the modernized environment.

In Berman's account, the 'Expressway World' means the dissolution of the urban landscape into a territory that was malleable according to functional necessities for the broad populace (e.g. ease of movement around New York), yet which ultimately did not take into account the people's needs. The fracture that this causes is comparable to that triggered by the fascist 'sventramenti' and the INA-Casa project in Rome; in both cases the ruptures and divisions affecting the city and its people take place under the alibi of creating public spaces that meet the people's needs. In other words, what the fascist 'sventramenti' share with the Bronx freeway is the conception of people as superfluous beings, to be removed as and when needed. Of course, these processes took place underneath a different rhetoric: while in the cases of New York and the INA-Casa projects claims were made on the basis of functional need, the 'sventramenti' ultimately created a symbolic and mythical space that reflected the ideology of the regime. Nevertheless, what characterizes the production of space in both of these metropolises during the age of high-capitalism is the desire to order, rationalize and cleanse those

³⁵ Berman, p. 308.

territories, streets and areas which had so far escaped immediate forms of control (Rome's vernacular and popular areas, built during the Middle Ages; Rome's borgate; New York's places of exchange and contact, such as the old Times Square; and so on).³⁶

5.3. The Body of the 'Ragazzo di vita' and the 'Borgata' as Biopolitical Paradigms of Rome's Modernity

In order to articulate better my discussion of the Roman periphery it may be useful at this point to sketch out the principal stages which led to the creation of the 'borgata', highlighting the important link between the formation of this urban space and Mussolini's project of modernization for Rome.

The word 'borgata' had started to be used in fascist times as a Roman pejorative for the Italian word 'borgo', which indicates a small village, usually isolated from other urban areas. The word 'borgata' expresses therefore refers to a particular kind of periphery, which is not simply a suburban area or an urban slum, but an area detached from the rest of the city, an urban microcosm. The construction of the 'borgate' was strictly bound to Mussolini's 'Hausmannization' of Rome, and to his desire to pursue an idea of modernity which combined the imperial heritage of the city with the needs of a modern European capital.

³⁶ Here I am referring to those urban 'regeneration schemes' which led to the destruction of popular areas characterized by high density and to the re-construction of the same areas according to a paradigm of rationalization and widening of space which followed the desire to perfectly control these spaces. Examples could evidently be extended beyond those cited here. Rome's 'sventramenti' and New York's postwar re-shaping could be equated to the infamous destruction of Paris under Haussman, as each one of these projects is characterized by the same desire for 'cleansing'. For Paris see David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), and Michel Carmona, *Haussmann: His Life and Times, and the Making of Modern Paris* (Chicago: I. R. Dee, 2002); for Rome, see Antonio Cederna, *Mussolini urbanista: lo sventramento di Roma negli anni del consenso* (Bari: Laterza, 1979), and Joshua Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity: the Roman Past in Fascist Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); for New York see Berman, in particular the chapter 'In the Forest of Symbols: Some Notes on Modernism in New York', pp. 290-348, and Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

This desire materialized in the 1931 master plan, which aimed to modernize the layout of the city. Thus, from the early 1920s onwards and above all after the urban plan of 1931, massive ‘sventramenti’ were undertaken in ancient areas of the city centre, such as Borgo Pio near the Vatican and a medieval quarter located between the Vittoriano and the Coliseum, which gave way to modern *boulevards*, more appropriate to serve the needs of a motorized metropolis. The people formerly living in these areas were forced to move to new neighborhoods, the ‘borgate’, quickly built with cheap materials outside Rome’s limits. As Vidotto says:

Gli sventramenti nel centro storico e il tracciato di nuove strade imposero una soluzione a un problema sempre deprecato, ma mai risolto. Nacquero così le borgate ufficiali: Acilia, Trullo, Primavalle, Tufello, Val Melaina, San Basilio, dei Gordiani, Acqua Bullicante, Tor Marancio, Sette Chiese, Donna Olimpia, collocate a raggiera intorno alla periferia. Case minime, cassette ‘rapidissime’ in muratura con servizi propri, altre con servizi in comune, in seguito costruite anche con materiali autarchici deteriorabili.³⁷

Despite the success of some architectural initiatives of the regime, and the undisputed talent of some architects such as the rationalist Adalberto Libera and Luigi Moretti, the decision to remove entire areas of the city centre provoked a deep trauma in both the topography of the city and the psychology of its ‘deported’ inhabitants. As John David Rhodes argues ‘residents of the borgate were more than simply displaced; they were quarantined [...]. Of the variety of abuses committed by the borgate, none was worse than what their material configuration did to their inhabitants’ mental ability to conceive of some form of social, civic life’.³⁸

As Rhodes highlights, the ‘borgate’ were essentially an act of removal of the lower classes from the most central and visible parts of the city to its outskirts, a segregation whose aim was to make these people invisible. This urban amputation both symbolically and physically displayed the authoritative nature of the regime. Thus, the

³⁷ Vittorio Vidotto, *Roma contemporanea* (Bari: Laterza, 2006), p. 199.

³⁸ Rhodes, pp. 9-10.

modernized Rome which emerged from the urban renewal implemented by fascism, appeared to a large extent as a post-traumatic territory, shattered by the irreparable loss caused by these abrupt changes. At the same time, the decision to destroy entire residential areas of the city centre and to move their inhabitants outside the city centre demonstrates how fascist urban policies were linked to a politics of space informed by the perceived need to remove both people and things, considered needless and superfluous by the dominant ideology, in order to pursue a dream of systematic order.

Moving back to Pasolini's portrayal of the 'borgate', we can argue that his political view on the Roman periphery emerges quite distinctively in his writings from Rome, as proven by a 1955 letter to his publisher, Livio Garzanti, in which he describes content and structure of his forthcoming novel *Ragazzi di vita*:

La mia 'poetica' narrativa consiste nell'incatenare l'attenzione sui dati immediati. E questo mi è possibile perché questi dati immediati trovano la loro collocazione in una struttura o arco narrativo ideale che coincide poi col contenuto morale del romanzo. Tale struttura si potrebbe definire con la formula generale: l'arco del dopoguerra a Roma, dal caos pieno di speranze dei primi giorni della liberazione alla reazione del '50-51. È un arco ben preciso che corrisponde col passaggio del protagonista e dei suoi compagni [...] dall'età eroica e amorale all'età già prosaica e immorale. A rendere 'prosaica e immorale' la vita di questi ragazzi [...] è la società che al loro vitalismo reagisce ancora una volta autoristicamente: imponendo la sua ideologia morale. Badi che tutto questo resta «prima» del libro: io come narratore non interferisco. Come non denuncio mai direttamente la responsabilità Fascista nella costruzione di quei campi di concentramento che sono le borgate romane, o sulla responsabilità attuale del governo che non ne ha risolto il problema.³⁹

This letter is particularly significant for the argument proposed in this thesis, in that it allows us to understand better Pasolini's perspective, both from an aesthetical and from a political/historical point of view. The description of his methodology of work in terms of 'incatenare' and 'attenzione sui dati immediati' can be likened to his paratactic and porous aesthetic, in which, as we have seen, images form through *coagulation* and are then assembled together as a series of fragments. This strategy of seeing is then related by Pasolini to Italy's 'hopeful' postwar history, which he attempts to capture by

³⁹ Pasolini, *Lettere 1940-1954*, pp. 703-04.

specifically portraying the life of the young Roman underclasses living in the ‘borgata’. Pasolini’s analogy between the Roman ‘borgata’ and the concentration camp appears remarkably different from the images used in his early correspondence, in that the Roman periphery is now compared to one of the most disturbing and disquieting places of contemporary history. The physical reality of the city is, for the author, a text symbolizing separation and fragmentation, and the Roman boys are described as trapped between their natural vitality and the authoritarian ideology of the ruling class.

Pasolini’s parallel between the ‘borgata’ and the concentration camp is reiterated in the article ‘I campi di concentramento’, written in 1958:

La ‘borgata’ è un fenomeno tipicamente romano, in quanto Roma fu capitale dello Stato Fascista [...] Le prime «borgate» furono costruite dai Fascisti in seguito agli sventramenti: sventramenti che non obbedivano solo a un ideale estetizzante-dannunziano, evidentemente: ma erano [...] operazioni di polizia. Forti contingenti di sottoproletariato romano, formicolante al centro, negli antichi quartieri sventrati, furono deportati in mezzo alla campagna, in quartieri isolati, costruiti non a caso come caserme o prigioni [...] le borgate democristiane sono identiche a quelle Fasciste, perché è identico il rapporto che si istituisce tra Stato e «poveri»: rapporto autoritario e paternalistico, profondamente inumano nella sua mistificazione religiosa.⁴⁰

Here Pasolini addresses the building of the borgate in terms of ‘operazioni di polizia’, and uses words such as ‘isolation’, ‘prison’, ‘inhuman’ and ‘deportation’, which highlight the repressive ideology that lies beneath the decision to remove the lower classes from central Rome to the outskirts of the city. According to Pasolini, postwar urban policies demonstrate how the relationship between the state and its poorest citizens is still the authoritarian one which was in place during fascism.

What this top-down conception of power demonstrates is a dynamic of continuity between fascist and postwar Italy. Rome is, for Pasolini, a territory in which spaces of social exclusion comparable to concentration camps – the borgate – are included in the millennial map of the ‘Eternal City’, creating an alternative *modern* topography from

⁴⁰ Pier Paolo Pasolini, ‘I campi di concentramento’, in *Romanzi e racconti*, I, pp. 1459-62 (p. 1462).

which classical and tourist landmarks are absent.⁴¹ In other words, the periphery becomes a space in which new immigrants, war evacuees or, more generally, every individual who does not belong to the upper or middle classes is relegated to live, in a situation of segregation and social invisibility. Pasolini's controversial comparison finds its *raison d'être* in the inner matrix which regulates both the camp and the 'borgata', which is the same reified and de-humanizing vision of men as objects rather than subjects. If we follow Pasolini's train of thought, both the hidden logic of Mussolini's decision to build a peripheral space detached from the traditional topography of Rome in order to exclude from the city centre the evacuees created by the 'sventramenti', and the rationale for the Christian Democrats' decision to follow the same paradigm of urban development, seem to parallel the logic of exclusion which led to the creation of the concentration camps.⁴²

In order to understand Pasolini's comparison better, we need to consider the birth of the camp, its genealogy, and its intrinsic relationship with the rise of modernity. Hannah Arendt was one of the first intellectuals to sketch out the historical steps which led to the creation of the camp and also to warn of the dangerous legacies left by totalitarianism. For her, the first phenomenon that could be compared to that of a concentration camp is that of the labor camps created in South Africa by the British colonizers during the Boer War, at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴³ In her analysis Arendt underlines how the creation of the concentration camps is related to a

⁴¹ For this reason, Keala Jewell considers Pasolini's Rome as a paradigm shift in the long chronology of the city's literary representations, defining it as an attempt to deconstruct the classical Roman palimpsest. For Jewell 'In the case of Pier Paolo Pasolini, a suburban, peripheral Rome appears to erase Ancient, Christian and Baroque Rome, yet his attention to the cafés and dusty streets of the 'borgate' does not belie the poet's fascination with the "subterranean". As Jewell highlights, this alternative peripheral Rome becomes for Pasolini the focal point in order to understand the city's modern development, as it paradigmatically displays its power dynamic. Keala Jewell, 'Pasolini: Deconstructing the Roman Palimpsest', *Substance*, 53 (1987), 55-66 (p. 55).

⁴² For a discussion of Pasolini's engagement with the Lager and the imagery of the Holocaust see Robert S. C. Gordon, 'Pasolini and the Lager Complex', in *Corpus XXX: Pasolini, Petrolino, Salò*, ed. by Davide Messina (Bologna: CLUEB, 2012), pp. 29-48, and Robert S. C. Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture, 1944-2010* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 131-33.

⁴³ See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 440.

form of sovereignty that originates with the advance of the instrumental logic of modernity. More specifically, for Arendt, the modern nation states' attempt to gain complete control and to systematize rigidly their territories triggered the creation of spaces of exclusion in which to assemble everybody that, for their juridical, political, ethnical or cultural background, did not belong to the authority which holds the executive and the legal power. Arendt considers the interwar period a crucial moment for the formation of the concentration camp, and recognizes in the power to exclude unwanted social classes from political existence the basic cultural attitude which led to the atrocity of the Nazi death camps, which she considers the final metamorphosis of the concentration camps.

Though the camp is a structural feature of fascist and Stalinist regimes, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt underlines how the same dynamic of exclusion, far from having disappeared after the fall of fascist regimes, was also a visible feature of post-war democracies:

the danger of the corpse factories and holes of oblivion is that today, with populations and homelessness everywhere on the increase, masses of people are continuously rendered superfluous if we continue to think of our world in utilitarian terms. Political, social, and economic events everywhere are in conspiracy with totalitarian instruments devised for making men superfluous.⁴⁴

According to Arendt, the postwar liberal age maintained and reproduced some of the cultural structures that were typical of the former period, in particular the attempt to make man superfluous through a utilitarian exploitation of power. Seen in this perspective, the camp is a space which finds its theoretical basis in a concept of power which transcends the ideological boundary between democracy and totalitarianism, and which appears to be strictly bound to the rise of capitalist modernity.

⁴⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 459.

In the light of Arendt's work, Pasolini's repeated definition of the 'borgata' as a concentration camp should be read more as an attempt to address the problem of the inheritance left over by totalitarian forms of government than as a comparison to be taken literally. As we have seen, in Pasolini's eyes, the Roman periphery responded to a politics of space characterized by the attempt to 'include' the population, contradictorily, through their exclusion. Though there was a practical urgency to house large numbers of immigrants, the homeless, and also wartime evacuees, Pasolini understood that the Christian Democrats' response to this crisis was ultimately a continuation of the fascist idea of modernity, which was characterized by division, exclusion and anonymity.⁴⁵

In this regard, Pasolini's recognition of the inner logic of exclusion shared by both the 'borgata' and the concentration camp can be better understood through comparison with the work of Giorgio Agamben who, drawing on Arendt's work, has shed light on the logic underlying the concentration camp. In *Homo sacer* Agamben compared the concentration camp with different spaces of exclusion, such as the stadium in the city of Bari in which, in 1991, the Italian police imprisoned a large number of Albanian immigrants before sending them back to their country, or the French velodrome where, in 1942, the Vichy authorities collected Jewish people before handing them over to the German occupants.

For Agamben, the concept which regulates places such as these – and to which, following Pasolini, we might also add the 'borgata' – is the principle of the 'state of exception'. According to the philosopher 'il campo è lo spazio che si apre quando lo

⁴⁵ As Renato Nicolini has observed, the construction boom of the 1950s (which produced the regular 'borgate') signalled the end of the idea of Rome as a 'città compatta', and its transition towards a 'città discontinua'. See Renato Nicolini, 'Roma 1950. Una città divisa', in Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco and Claudia Terenzi (eds), *Roma 1948-1959: arte, cronaca e cultura dal neorealismo alla dolce vita* (Milan: Skira, 2002), pp. 225-37 (p. 228): 'La città compatta, prevista dal PRG del 1931, e che era rimasta sostanzialmente conforme a questo modello, teorizzato assieme all'espansione a macchia d'olio dalla grande urbanistica tedesca (ma tra la fine dell'Ottocento e l'inizio del Novecento), si era trasformata in città discontinua, che con la compattezza aveva perduto forma e linguaggio architettonico unificanti per dichiararsi come un insieme di parti differenziate e discordanti, autonome una dall'altra'.

stato di eccezione comincia a diventare la regola'.⁴⁶ The state of exception, a concept which was codified by the political analyses of Carl Schmitt and Walter Benjamin, is activated when those in charge of the executive power decide, for 'exceptional' reasons, to overstep juridical law. Their word becomes therefore effective law.⁴⁷ Once the 'state of exception' is proclaimed, the sovereign power can dispose of people's lives. The 'state of exception' is therefore a space created by the sovereign power in order to *include* undesired people in the social structure of the state by *excluding* them from the rest of civil society. In short, it is a space that includes through exclusion.

Agamben underlines the fact that the camp, understood as 'state of exception', should be seen as the paradigmatic space of modernity, and not only as a political practice deployed by totalitarian regimes.⁴⁸ According to him, 'the birth of the camp in our time appears as an event that decisively signals the political space of modernity itself'.⁴⁹ It is for this reason that – at least since the advent of capitalist modernity – the camp is a space which can reappear every time the sovereign power has to overstep juridical law in order to decide on what it is considered an exceptional event, from the containment of colonized people to the control of migratory fluxes. For Agamben:

Il campo come *localizzazione dislocante* è la matrice nascosta della politica in cui ancora viviamo, che dobbiamo imparare a riconoscere attraverso tutte le sue metamorfosi, nelle *zones d'attente* dei nostri aeroporti come in certe periferie delle nostre città.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 188.

⁴⁷ For a detailed account of Benjamin's and Schmitt's theorizations of the 'state of exception' see Horst Bredekamp, 'From Walter Benjamin to Carl Schmitt, via Thomas Hobbes', trans. by Melissa Thorson Hause and Jackson Bond, *Critical Inquiry*, 25.2 (1999), 247-66. In the article, after stating the similarities and reciprocal influences between the two thinkers, the author highlights how 'while Schmitt views the sovereign who establishes himself in the reciprocity of normal continuity and the state of exception, as both necessary and possible, Benjamin speaks of his absence. His *Trauerspiel* shows rulers who are only seemingly able to govern the state of exception' (p. 260).

⁴⁸ Richard Ek offers an interesting reading of Agamben's philosophy through the frame of space theory in 'Giorgio Agamben and the Spatialities of the Camp: an Introduction', *Geografiska Annaler*, 88 (2006), 363-86. In a very explicit passage he argues that '[t]he abandonment and desubjectification of humans are not only political but spatial performances as well' (p. 376).

⁴⁹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 174.

⁵⁰ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 197.

The ability to recognize the metamorphosing of the camp in different social spaces, and the attention to legacies, traces, remnants of fascism in postwar Italy, provide a link between Agamben's analysis of the camp as hidden matrix of the politics of our times and Pasolini's representation of postwar Rome. Just as in Agamben's interpretation of the camp, Pasolini's 'borgata' appears as a threshold-zone created by the ruling sovereign power. It is in light of this similarity that, rephrasing Schmitt and Benjamin, we could call Pasolini's 'borgata' a *space* of exception.

According to Agamben, the main reason that led to the creation of the camp is the power's will to take control over people's natural and political existence. To elucidate this distinction, the Italian philosopher uses ancient Greek's differentiation between *zoé* (natural existence or naked life) and *bíos* (civic or political existence). For him one of the most obvious and dangerous outcomes of modernity is the politicization of the *zoé*, which since at least the nineteenth century has started to become the real object of interest of power. This observation led him to re-conceptualize, in *Homo sacer*, Michel Foucault's definition of biopolitics.

In the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* Foucault had linked the repression of the body to capitalist modernity, highlighting how, from the eighteenth century onwards, new mechanisms of power 'took charge of men's existence, men as living bodies'.⁵¹ This new power dynamic was enacted 'not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus'.⁵² For Foucault, unlike earlier historical periods, in modernity power acquired the ability to manipulate people's bodies beyond juridical law, using devices of power, such as hospitalization and confession, which lay outside the juridical domain. This set of new rules which aimed at controlling human behaviour was defined by the French philosopher as 'biopolitics'. With this term he wanted to

⁵¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 89.

⁵² *Ibid.*

underline how the objective of power was no longer to prohibit or deny certain actions or behaviour but to take control of peoples' lives themselves, in their corporeality.

Foucault's concept of biopolitics encompasses a complex system of cultural transformations that influenced patterns of social behaviour accompanying the rise of European modernity. Drawing on this definition, Agamben notes that biopolitics, precisely because it is the most emblematic aspect of modernity,⁵³ is also the most striking and worrying characteristic of the most paradigmatic space of modernity, the concentration camp:

In quanto i suoi abitanti sono stati spogliati di ogni statuto politico e ridotti integralmente a nuda vita, il campo è anche il più assoluto spazio biopolitico che sia mai stato realizzato, in cui il potere non ha di fronte a sé che la pura vita senz'alcuna mediazione. Per questo il campo è il paradigma stesso dello spazio politico nel punto in cui la politica diventa biopolitica e l'*homo sacer* si confonde virtualmente col cittadino.⁵⁴

In his analysis of the biopolitical aspect of modernity, Agamben underlines how in the camp the bond between private and public, between natural life and political life comes to an end. Indeed, by politicizing natural life the camp takes control over people's natural existence, and by politicizing the body of the prisoner of the camp, power becomes biopower. The reason, Agamben argues, for which the concentration camp displays the biopower of modernity at its maximum lies in the fact that the task of the camp is that of separating the political from the biological in order to control human life entirely. This process of the politicization of the natural is what produces bare life, of which the body of the *Muselmann* – the camp prisoner in his/her terminal phase, by then unable to coordinate gesture and speech – is the paradigmatic example.⁵⁵

⁵³ See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 7: 'Gli "enigmi" che il nostro secolo ha proposto alla ragione storica e che continuano a restare attuali (il nazismo è solo il più inquietante fra essi) potranno essere sciolti solo sul terreno – la biopolitica – sul quale sono stati annodati'.

⁵⁴ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 191.

⁵⁵ Jean Améry describes the 'Muselmann' as 'il prigioniero che aveva abbandonato ogni speranza ed era stato abbandonato dai compagni [...]. Era un cadavere ambulante, un fascio di funzioni fisiche ormai in agonia'. In Jean Améry, *Un intellettuale ad Auschwitz*, trans. by Enrico Ganni (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri,

Pasolini's 'borgata' seems to reproduce a similar pattern to the biopolitical dynamic at work in the concentration camp and to the inability of the *Muselmann* to speak. Pasolini's biopolitical reading of the Roman periphery and the 'ragazzo di vita' is mirrored in the physical descriptions of the people who inhabit these functionalized spaces. The initial image of spirited and energetic young boys singing and walking around Rome is contrasted, in Pasolini's later novels, with alternative descriptions of the same characters. Begalone is a paradigmatic character in this respect. In 'Bagno sull'Aniene,' the sixth chapter of *Ragazzi di vita*, he is depicted as a bully who harasses younger boys while swimming in the river Aniene:

Con quell'occhi storti che c'aveva, lenticchioso e roscio, il Begalone si poteva senza nemmeno considerare lì il più dritto di tutta la cricca: e difatti ci si considerava, mica no, mentre senza nemmeno guardarlo, con aria paziente, accchiappava con la mano per il collo il Piattoletta.⁵⁶

Begalone is continuously described as one of the most vital but also impudent characters of the novel. He behaves like a bully and often harasses smaller boys such as Piattoletta. This image of Begalone, who is often described as 'il più dritto della cricca', characterizes the early stages of the novel, in which the boys are still living outside the social dynamic of the modernized city. Later, in the second part of the book, when Begalone enters the social realm of adult life, his impudence mutates into something else:

Il Begalone non la smetteva di tossire con dei raschi e delle espettorazioni che parevano botti dati con un mestolo dentro un bidone vuoto; la sua pelle gialla era coperta da una mano di rossore che nascondeva i cigolini; pareva che sul suo costato di crocefisso, anziché pelle normale, ci fosse attaccata della carne bollita [...] Finalmente si gettò a nuoto, e navigò per un po' a mezzobraccetto in mezzo al fiume: ma si sentì ancora peggio: la capoccia gli girava come un picchio con la zagaia, e gli pareva di sentirsi dentro allo stomaco un gatto morto. Stava quasi per sturbarsi. Si spaventò e nuotò affannosamente verso la riva; appena rimesso piede a

1987), p. 39. For a philosophical analysis of the figure of the 'Muselmann' see Giorgio Agamben, *Quel che resta di Auschwitz*, pp. 37-80.

⁵⁶ Pasolini, 'Ragazzi di vita', pp. 680-81.

terra tutto gocciolante, non riuscì a reggersi diritto, s'inginocchiò sulla fanga e lì rivomitò.⁵⁷

The repeated motif of Begalone bathing in the Aniene both relates and diametrically opposes this scene to the previous one, cited above. The earlier image of Begalone as an insolent daredevil, confident of his body within the environment, is subsequently replaced by that of an agonized phantom, who vomits involuntarily, signaling a loss of control over his actions. His skin, once red and freckled, is now yellow and resembles boiled meat. His vitality and insolence have metamorphosed into fear and anguish, and his strength and health have given way to the body of a sick man.

Begalone is one of the many characters depicted by Pasolini whose natural exuberance becomes oppressed and normalized by the sordid condition of life in which they are forced to live. In the opening pages of *Una vita violenta*, Lello appears to be one of the most lively 'ragazzi di vita' and is described as a handsome rogue. Yet, a few chapters later he looks like a completely different person. We find him begging along one of Rome's main streets, via del Corso, and his former brightness seems to have faded away:

Che razza di cambiamento aveva fatto Lello, dai tempi quando s'andava a avventurare dentro Roma coi compari! S'era sciupato, smagrito, pure i capelli, che una volta ci teneva tanto a curarseli, non parevano poi quelli. La barba era di almeno sei o sette giorni, ma era chiara e rada e non si vedeva tanto: ma zozzo sì, era, e c'aveva nella pelle come un unto, qualcosa che gli trasudava, che pareva non gli dovesse andare via nemmeno con la varecchina, da tanto tempo ormai gli era penetrata dentro, come a quasi tutti gli stroppi, gli scianchettati colleghi suoi.⁵⁸

As the example of Lello demonstrates, the boys' sickness and the disappearance of the earlier light from their eyes are caused by their move from childhood to adulthood within a corrosive social environment. The boys' initiation into adult life is perceived as a traumatic moment that leads them to a progressive loss of identity. The act of

⁵⁷ Pasolini, 'Ragazzi di vita', p. 754.

⁵⁸ Pasolini, 'Una vita violenta', p. 1041.

maturing leads the boys outside their protective microcosm and into a broader, 'adult' society (marked within the narrative by rites of passage such as marriage or employment).

Another example of this progressive biopoliticization of life can be found in the description of Alduccio's father in *Ragazzi di vita*:

in mutande e con ancora addosso la giacca nera di lavoro [...] cieco pel vino che aveva bevuto, coi capelli spettinati e sudati sulla fronte. Stette un poco lì fermo, forse perchè s'era scordato che cosa aveva intenzione di fare: poi alzò una mano, se la portò davanti alla bocca, e la mosse su e giù, nell'aria, dall'altezza del cuore a un punto indeterminato all'altezza del naso: come se sottolineasse un lungo e complicato discorso che non gli usciva di bocca. Alla fine, come s'accorse che non ce la faceva a esprimersi, ripartì di corsa verso il letto.⁵⁹

The inability to utter a single word underlines the loss of consciousness of Alduccio's father, who, having completely relinquished the ability to coordinate gesture and speech, enters into that biopolitical realm of which the *Muselmann* in the concentration camp represents the final stage. Pasolini's representation of Alduccio's father seems thus to register the fall of human experience into a realm of artificiality and automaticity.

This biopolitical line of demarcation in the lives of the 'ragazzi di vita' highlights the state of subalternity of Rome's periphery within the topography of the city. The separation of the periphery from the city centre is framed positively as long as the 'ragazzi' are able to resist the force of attraction exercised by the centre (the symbol of sovereign power). However, as soon as the 'ragazzo di vita' enters into the biopolitical dynamics produced by the centre, its corruptive influence becomes apparent.

This dynamic is further illustrated in Pasolini's ambivalent representation of the 'borgata', which initially offers a chance of escape from the authoritarian and

⁵⁹ Pasolini, 'Ragazzi di vita', p. 740-41.

patronizing postwar Roman society. This positive vision is evident in a number of descriptions in *Una vita violenta*, such as the following:

Era sera a Pietralata: per chi era appena dopocena e per chi prima, ma tutti erano allegri e sciamannati, andando avanti e indietro per le strade della borgata. L'aria poi era dolce dolce, e bastava che si muovesse un po' di vento perchè prendesse un sapore di mele cotogne, di ruchetta bagnata di guazza.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, when the periphery is no longer able to resist the power of attraction exercised by the centre, Pasolini's description changes drastically, becoming far more negative and thus implicitly critical:

Fuori, c'era l'inferno. Tutto era grigio, accasciato. Le file di case si paravano scolorite per le strade vuote, tra gli orticelli senza una foglia, senza un'anticchia di verde. Camminando, contro la carne si attaccava come uno straccio bagnato d'acqua calda.⁶¹

The attention paid by Pasolini to both the bodies of the 'ragazzi di vita' and the changing shape of the modernized city leads to descriptions of Rome as a polarized territory, in which opposing features coexist without the possibility of any synthetic solution. Rome's dialectical aspect seems to be linked – in Pasolini's representation – to the severance between pre-modern and modern elements, which in the representation of people responds to the dissociation between bare life (*zoé*) and political life (*bios*). More explicitly, the 'borgata' is sublime in those moments when it represents the permanence of an ideal, pre-modern past embodied in the 'ragazzo di vita', whereas it is corrupted when it passively absorbs the disrupting biopolitical force of modernity, as displayed by the adults living in the 'borgata' or by the INA-Casa house project.

In conclusion, the assonance between Pasolini's, Arendt's and Agamben's analyses allows us to liken the experience of the camp with that of the 'borgata'. Pasolini's association between the two focuses on the way in which excluded subjects perform

⁶⁰ Pasolini, 'Una vita violenta', p. 982.

⁶¹ Pasolini, 'Una vita violenta', p. 1093.

their own role in society. What Pasolini witnesses in a postwar Rome under the siege of a rapid modernization is the progressive alienation of the individual from his/her natural realm.⁶² Through the comparison between the camp and the ‘borgata’, he bears witness to the separation of the natural body from the political body carried out by the sovereign power. However, to do justice to Pasolini’s argument, it is also crucial to differentiate between the degrees of exception constituted by these two spaces. In the concentration camp – and even more so in the Nazi death camps – the bodies of the prisoners were constrained by a set of rigid rules which denied them any chance of escape, while in the ‘borgata’ people are forced to live in a hopeless situation of marginality. What still brings these two locations together, however, is their hidden paradigmatic logic: the barring of undesired individuals from socio-political existence.

⁶² Cf. Fabio Vighi, ‘Pasolini and Exclusion: Zizek, Agamben and the Modern Sub-Proletariat’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 20.99 (2003), 99-121: ‘Pasolini’s critique, especially from the 1960s onwards, bears extraordinary significance in today’s global constellation as [...] it is essentially founded on a pressing concern with the universalization of our liberal-democratic and late-capitalist experience’ (p. 99).

Section III. The Entropic City

The years spanning the early 1960s and the mid-1970s represented a moment of significant redefinition for Rome. The sense of hope which had characterized the postwar period and the frenetic years of Italy's economic development appeared to give way, towards the end of the 1960s, to a period of reconsideration of the processes and impulses that had developed since the end of the Second World War. 1968 represented a very important year for the unravelling of those processes. It constituted a sort of historical watershed as well as the site of a civil battle (if not a proper war) between the fathers and mothers who had grown up during fascism and lived through a world war, and their sons and daughters, who aimed to break away from the older generation, which they considered too implicated in the errors of the recent past as well as responsible for the failures of the present.¹

From an urban perspective, Rome kept growing at a fast rate (the statistics show a growth of 27% in the decade 1961-1971), and its population overtook, for the first time in centuries, that of the city of Paris, thus making Rome the third most populous European city after London and Berlin.² A posteriori, this can be considered a crucial period for the development of the modern idea of Rome, in which the city represented an ambivalent incubator of modernist images, aesthetics, and dystopias. Though the images associated with *La dolce vita* and the international resonance of the 1960 Olympic Games propagated a positive and glamourized idea of Rome, the 'dark side' of this sudden growth was recorded by journalistic inquiries and urban studies, such as those of Antonio Cederna and Italo Insolera, which shed light on the corruption and

¹ For a detailed account of the 1968 protests in Italy and beyond see Marcello Flores and Alberto De Bernardi, *Il Sessantotto* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003).

² According to the 1968 census, the city of Paris had a population of 2,590,771 inhabitants, while according to the 1971 census the total for Rome was 2,781,993. See Vittorio Vidotto, *Roma contemporanea* (Bari: Laterza, 2006), in particular pp. 278-88.

speculation that characterized the city's process of modern restructuring. Insolera's *Roma moderna* (1962) and Cederna's *Mirabilia Urbis* (1965) framed Rome's process of urban development in terms 'un-mappability' and of widespread political corruption, emphasizing the on-going destruction of the traditional structure of the city. Specifically, Insolera foregrounded the 'unknowability' of 1960s and 1970s Rome, noting the lack of tools able to capture its new map ('Ignoriamo Roma, la vita degli uomini che vi abitano, il rapporto di questi con l'ambiente').³ Cederna, on the other hand, highlighted the fact that Rome in the mid-1960s had become an urban entity which had nothing to do with the traditional meaning evoked by its name. It was, instead, an enormous metropolis characterized by a decrepit city centre and by a squalid and enormous periphery:

Roma presenta oggi un centro storico degradato e impraticabile, incrostato in mezzo a un'immensa, informe agglomerazione, squallida e sterminata periferia, sorta nel segno della violenza privata e della complicità pubblica, che tutto si può chiamare fuor che città. La stessa configurazione fisica di Roma è stata distrutta: un unico tavoliere di cemento, uno stomachevole, soffocante magma di 'palazzine' e 'intensivo', colma le valli, ricopre le colline, sommerge la campagna, grazie allo sfruttamento dell'ultimo metro quadrato disponibile, quasi ci si fosse proposti di impedire a chiunque di dire: questa era Roma.⁴

The process described here by Cederna is the suburban ramification of Rome into territories previously occupied by the countryside, across its valleys and hills. What was once the 'Eternal City' – a palimpsest of classical and baroque buildings, of ancient ruins and monuments, and of narrow streets – has been transformed into the clashing amalgamation of a degraded historical city with its modern periphery. The historical city, surrounded by the countryside, had given way to a 'concrete grid' scattered with high-rise buildings which ended up submerging the Roman countryside.

³ Italo Insolera, *Roma moderna: un secolo di storia urbanistica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), p. 321.

⁴ Antonio Cederna, *Mirabilia Urbis: cronache romane 1957-1965* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), p. viii.

This period also witnessed the ratification of a new master plan for Rome. Approved in 1962, this was the first comprehensive project since 1931, and sought to establish the ground for the development of the city in the following decades. Specifically, the main aim of the project was to re-balance Rome's expansion towards the South-East and to regulate the phenomenon of the unauthorized construction of entire residential areas ('abusivismo edilizio'). However, as the urban historian Leonardo Benevolo has argued, many of the legal urban settlements approved by the 1962 plan failed to be built while, simultaneously, illegal squatting developed in an uncontrolled way, thus compromising the general scheme proposed by the urban plan.⁵

It was precisely this inability to follow the guidelines of the master plan during a period of such furious and frenzied growth which led to the definitive fracture of Rome's urban map. After the 1960s, Rome's periphery could no longer be seen as a further ramification of the central town; rather it became an urban block of its own: open, swarming and at the same time set in opposition to the occluded and congested city-centre. The former continued to grow at an exceptional pace while the latter crystallized into its own simulacrum. As Benevolo writes:

in questo periodo avviene la rottura della forma urbana unitaria: lo sviluppo irregolare dal dopoguerra in poi forma ormai una cintura omogenea, in senso fisico e in senso sociale, contrapposta al nucleo regolare. La cintura cresce con un dinamismo eccezionale, mentre il nucleo è quasi fermo e piuttosto si consolida aumentando la densità.⁶

The process of progressive expansion, which continued throughout the 1960s, noticeably started to slow down from the early 1970s onwards, in conjunction with the economic and energy crises which hit Western society on an international scale. While the 1950s and 1960s had constituted a period of constant and progressive growth, the

⁵ See Leonardo Benevolo, *Roma dal 1870 al 1990* (Bari: Laterza, 1992), p. 160.

⁶ Benevolo, p. 140.

1970s represented a moment of stagnation.⁷ This change appears striking if we compare the statistics for the decade 1961-1971, in which Rome's population grew, as we saw, by 27%, with those for the decade 1971-1981, in which it only grew by 3%. As Insolera writes in the second edition of his *Roma moderna*, published in 1971, 'Roma 1970 non è più la città del '50, del '60 un po' cambiata, un po' cresciuta, un po' intasata, un po' inquinata. È un'altra città'.⁸ At the end of this process of expansion, an aerial snapshot of Rome would capture the shapeless form of a swarming suburban area which not only expanded well beyond the limits of the ancient city, represented by the Aurelian Walls, but which also breached the borders of the modern city, embodied by the Grande Raccordo Anulare – an immense ring road built between 1952 and 1970.

⁷ Cf. Marshall Berman, *All that Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), in particular pp. 329-48.

⁸ Insolera, p. 321.

6. Images of Disorder: Shrinking Horizons and Sense of Loss in 1970s Rome

In this section I will undertake a genealogical reading of a third paradigm shift of Rome's image, from the expanding city of the 1960s to the stagnating one of the 1970s. I will highlight how, towards the end of the 1960s, Fellini's earlier depiction of Rome's fast expanding cityscape and Pasolini's anthropological discovery of a submerged humanity living at the margins of city suddenly appear out-dated. Just a few years have passed since the release of *Ragazzi di vita*, *Una vita violenta* and *La dolce vita* but Rome's representation as well as these authors' aesthetics appear to have undergone a period of crisis and redefinition.¹ The 'dilated' city of the early 1960s appears to fade away, giving way to the emergence of a territory characterized by virulent physical and ideological clashes.

In order to understand better this third paradigm of Rome's 1970s imagery, I will first briefly analyse the way in which Fellini and Pasolini themselves dealt with the fracture produced by the vanishing of the porous image of Rome that they had helped to create. I will then move to a discussion of how *Nuovi argomenti* – which as we have seen in the previous section represented one of the most emblematic voices of the Roman intellectuals of those years – engaged with the historical fracture provoked by 1968. In particular I will examine the debate surrounding Pasolini's publication of the poem 'Il PCI ai giovani!!' and his argument about an entropic mutation of Italian society. While this poem has generally been interpreted as a sign of Pasolini's late conservatism, I will instead read it as a symptom of an irreparable temporal fracture in the fabric of Italian society. Finally, I will turn my attention to a series of heterogeneous texts marked by the shared attempt to frame the trajectory of Rome's cultural and

¹ This feeling of crisis is reflected, for example, in the meta-cinematic crisis of the protagonist of Fellini's *8½* (1963) and in Pasolini's failed attempt to write the third novel of his proposed Roman trilogy after the publication of *Ragazzi di vita* (1955) and *Una vita violenta* (1959).

literary changes between the 1960s and the 1970s as a process of temporal and spatial disarticulation. In particular, I will examine Mario Praz's *Panopticon romano* (1967), Eugenio Ragni's *Roma nella letteratura italiana contemporanea* (1988), and the collection of articles entitled *Contro Roma* (1975), as examples of the emergence of Rome's entropic shift.

6.1. Vanishing Points: The Mutation of the 'Expanding City'

The parabola followed by both Pasolini's and Fellini's representations of Rome signals the need to come to terms with the iconic image of the city which they helped to create. Their return to Rome in works like 'La sequenza del fiore di carta' (1969) and *Petrolino* (written 1972-1975, published in 1992) for Pasolini, and 'Toby Dammit' (1968) and *Roma* (1972) for Fellini, frames the progression between the 1960s and the 1970s in terms of a dramatic temporal fracture.

Fellini's revisiting of Rome's cityscape captures the end of that process of detachment between tradition and modernity whose early warning signs had characterized *La dolce vita*. In 'Toby Dammit' and *Roma* this process drastically radicalizes, influencing the way in which Rome's cityscape is represented and contributing to the formation of a different aesthetic. The sense of cynicism, dissatisfaction and feebleness which distinguished Marcello, Maddalena and Elena, mutates into the self-destructiveness of Toby Dammit who, after driving without direction through an un-recognizable Rome, ends up decapitated – an act which it would be tempting to read as symbolic of the destruction of Rome's traditional urban form, and of the centre-less and tentacular urbanscape of the contemporary city.² As Fabio Benincasa has noted, in 'Toby Dammit' Rome appears as a 'Kafkaesque hell [...]

² 'Toby Dammit', dir. by Federico Fellini, in *Histoires extraordinaires* (Cocinor, 1969). 'Toby Dammit' is a free adaption of Edgar Allan Poe's 'Never Bet the Devil Your Head' (1841).

a secluded place that is impossible to enter or to exit'.³ This entropic aspect of impenetrability and un-mappability, can be captured through a comparison between the 'road scenes' of *La dolce vita* and *Roma*. If the earlier film is characterized by continuous vectorial and centrifugal movements from the inside to the outside, from the centre to the periphery, in the second the cinematic gaze moves in a circular and non-linear way. An example of this is the contrast between Sylvia's journey from Ciampino airport to her hotel in the city centre in *La dolce vita* – which takes us along the Via Appia Antica, characterized by the coexistence of goats and cars, green fields and film cameras – with the grotesque attempt, in *Roma*, to get into Rome's city-centre via the hyper-congested GRA – which represents a visible sign of fracture between the historical and the modern city.⁴

As for Pasolini, the progressive shift of his attention from Rome's peripheries to pre-modern settings such as medieval Europe and the Third World is accompanied, from the end of the 1960s onwards, by the attempt to come to terms with the changes that Rome and the 'ragazzi di vita' had undergone during the previous decade. The two works in which Pasolini enacts this attempt are the short film 'La sequenza del fiore di carta', and the novel *Petrolio*. Ricetto's death in the 'Sequenza del fiore di carta', and the figure of the 'Merda' in *Petrolio* – a sort of anthropological mutation of the 'ragazzo di vita' – mark Rome's conversion from a past characterized by the dialectical coexistence of opposites to a dystopian present, marked by a feeling of loss. While I will provide a close analysis of *Petrolio* in the next chapter, I will now briefly discuss the 'Sequenza del fiore di carta' in order to investigate the way in which Pasolini engages with this historical fracture.

³ Fabio Benincasa, 'The Explosion of Rome in the Fragments of a Postmodern Iconography: Federico Fellini and the *Forma Urbis*', in *Rome, Postmodern Narratives of a Cityscape*, ed. by Dom Holdaway and Filippo Trentin (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), pp. 39-56.

⁴ *Roma*, dir. by Federico Fellini (Ital-Noleggio Cinematografico, 1972).

The short film 'La sequenza del fiore di carta' is a section of an omnibus film entitled *Amore e rabbia*, which also includes episodes directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, Jean-Luc Godard, Carlo Lizzani and Marco Bellocchio.⁵ In the film we find Riccetto, played by Ninetto Davoli, walking around Rome's city centre with a tall red flower made of paper. Pasolini's camera tracks Riccetto/Ninetto as he wanders – like a flashing firefly – from via Nazionale to piazza Venezia. Meanwhile Pasolini dissolves brief sequences that capture images of war and destruction intermittently into the diegesis, so that the past is seen to haunt Rome's cityscape. These snapshots are a juxtaposition of some of the most emblematic moments and characters of twentieth-century history – from the bombs of the Second World War to those of the Vietnam War and from the faces of Lyndon Johnson and Queen Elizabeth II to the dead body of Che Guevara. The sequence effectively aims to point out the contrast between Riccetto's naïve cheerfulness and the dramatic unravelling of history's tragedies. Riccetto's walk is accompanied by the voice of God which keeps inviting him to become more receptive to history's injustices. The calls remain unanswered and in the last frame we hear the voice stating 'Io non posso perdonare chi passa con lo sguardo felice dell'innocente tra le ingiustizie e le guerre, tra gli orrori e il sangue'. Then, in the following shot, after hearing the sound of bombs and fusillades and seeing images of dead bodies lying mutilated on the ground, the camera stalls on Riccetto's body, which lies dead on the cobblestones of Piazza Venezia.

'La sequenza del fiore di carta' offers a glimpse of some of the cracks which compose the historical fracture I will address throughout this chapter. The juxtaposition of shots of death and war on the streets of Via Nazionale with the dead body of Riccetto marks the entry of Rome into a territory that differs markedly from the booming city of the late 1950s and early 1960s. It represents the collapse of the porous and dialectical

⁵ 'La sequenza del fiore di carta', dir. by Pier Paolo Pasolini, in *Amore e rabbia* (Ital-Noleggio Cinematografico, 1969).

cityscape of that city and of the glittering characters who populated it. The decision to stage the death of Riccetto, the first and perhaps most emblematic protagonist of Pasolini's Roman saga, appears therefore a way to stage, simultaneously, the death of the 'stupendous and miserable' image of Rome and to signal the emergence of an entropic cityscape.

Petrolio, which will be the focus of the next chapter, follows 'La sequenza del fiore di carta' in that it represents Pasolini's most ambitious attempt to dissect and come to terms with the unresolved nodes of Italy's postwar modernity, from the continuities between fascist and Republican Italy to the rise of Italy as an economic power, or to terrorism and the homologation triggered by the new consumerist society. Rome plays a key role in *Petrolio*, as the scene of some of the most important passages of the book: not only is it the seat of the 'Palazzo', the embodiment of Italian political corruption, but it is also the main stage from which Pasolini witnesses the coming of what he calls 'post-history'. In *Petrolio*, the dusty and somehow picaresque Rome of the borgata will mutate into a dark and gloomy cityscape, strewn with squalid and dissociated figures who share nothing with the vitality of Accattone and Riccetto.

6.2. *Nuovi argomenti* and 1968: Valle Giulia and the Fracture with Tradition

Nuovi argomenti concluded its original series and started a new one in 1966. This change coincided with the arrival of Pasolini on the editorial board of the journal, where he joined Carocci and Moravia. Pasolini's presence in *Nuovi argomenti* contributed to the beginning of a process of renovation of the journal, with the group of core collaborators formed by a combination of older and younger intellectuals, from Pasolini, Moravia, Amelia Rosselli and Elsa Morante, to Dacia Maraini, Enzo Siciliano, Dario Bellezza, Ginevra Bompiani and Giorgio Agamben. From a theoretical point of

view, the new series was marked by a shift of interest from ethnology and cultural anthropology to linguistics, semiotics and psychoanalysis – from the domain of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Ernesto de Martino to that of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan. This shift became particularly evident towards the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, in conjunction with the intensification of the process of neo-capitalist modernization of Italian society, and with the generational crisis which permeated Italy as well as other Western countries like France, the United States and Germany, eventually resulting in the protest movements of 1968. The symptoms of this shift can be evinced even from a brief overview of the titles of articles in the new series of *Nuovi argomenti*, which included pieces written by the linguist Christian Metz, the literary critics Roland Barthes and Jean Starobinski, and by Agamben, all of whom are considered among the most representative post-structuralist thinkers.

The tenth issue of the new series, published in June 1968, is emblematic in its attempt to capture the controversial mood of the period, which was characterized by a sense of novelty, but also by strong ideological, generational and political contrapositions. The issue featured articles by Giorgio Manacorda on the Roman student movement, by the American theatre director Julian Beck on the revolutionary purposes of the international student movement, by Starobinski on psychoanalysis and literary theory, and by the French psychologist Philippe Malrieu on problems of methodology in the work of Jacques Lacan. These articles were accompanied by a poem written by Pasolini and entitled ‘Il PCI ai giovani!!’, which was intended as a polemical response to the violent clashes between students and policemen that had taken place in front of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Rome on 1 March 1968, the so-called ‘Battaglia di Valle Giulia’. The polemical reactions which followed the publication of this poem spread nationally, thus constituting a rare example of poetry’s ability to exercise an immediate impact on a vast mass of people. The reasons for that

fierce debate lay in the fact that, in the poem, Pasolini unexpectedly expressed his support to the policemen over the students:

Quando ieri a Valle Giulia avete fatto a botte
coi poliziotti,
io simpatizzavo coi poliziotti!
Perché i poliziotti sono figli di poveri.
Vengono da subtopie, contadine o urbane che siano.⁶

What scandalized most of the people involved in the controversy was the fact that Pasolini, a Marxist intellectual who in many of his novels, films and poems had openly denounced the very mechanism of class repression that is typically supported by the police, was now withdrawing his own support from those who were apparently the new victims of that mechanism of repression – the students. For Franco Fortini the reasons for this critique were to be found in Pasolini's narcissism – 'non ti bastava essere d'Annunzio, hai voluto essere anche Malaparte'⁷ – and in his inability to develop a more complex idea of class struggle, one which could overcome the hyper-simplistic vision of a fight between the rich and the poor. As Fortini writes 'Per te la lotta di classe è quasi sempre stata soltanto la lotta dei poveri contro i ricchi e i rapporti tra borghesia e proletariato soltanto un consueto conflitto di razionalità e irrazionalità [...] da quando l'oppressione ha assunto nuove forme, non hai capito più'.⁸ Fortini's severe judgment of Pasolini's article, which signalled the end of their rich but often difficult intellectual cooperation, touches upon some important points in Pasolini's theoretical position, in particular his idea of class struggle as based on a rigid dichotomy between the 'poor-oppressed' and the 'rich-oppressors'. The rigidity and the apparent anachronism of this contraposition had previously been problematized by some of the ideologists of the New Left, such as Herbert Marcuse, who saw in the students' movement a real

⁶ Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Il PCI ai giovani!!', *Nuovi argomenti*, 10 (1968), reprinted in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), I, pp. 1440-50.

⁷ Franco Fortini, *Attraverso Pasolini* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), p. 41.

⁸ Fortini, p. 39.

opportunity to challenge the ideological assumptions of Western societies, in particular the pact between neo-capitalism and patriarchy.⁹

However, Pasolini's position was more subtle and complex than Fortini and many of his critics would allow. His critique of the students' movement was indeed all but a definite rejection of the possibility of acting and resisting institutionalized power. As Robert Gordon has argued, Pasolini's position on the student movement 'is far more positive towards the students than any of the polemic over 'Il PCI ai giovani!! might suggest'.¹⁰ Gordon underlines how elsewhere Pasolini tends to endorse the students' opposition to institutional power, going as far as to argue that 'la Resistenza e il Movimento Studentesco sono le due uniche esperienze democratiche-rivoluzionarie del popolo italiano'.¹¹ This much more open approach to the students' protests is already evident in the note which accompanies the poem in *Nuovi argomenti*, in which Pasolini states that 'siamo ovviamente d'accordo contro l'istituzione della polizia'.¹² On the one hand Pasolini notes how the narrative of the students' protest symptomatically demonstrates that the word 'revolution' had moved from describing the fight of an oppressed social class against an oppressive one to describing an internal fight within the same social class. On the other hand he aims to capture an almost imperceptible mutation of the physiognomy of power, that is 'l'esclusione, da parte del Potere, delle

⁹ Marcuse is generally considered one of the ideological fathers of the 1968 students' protests, in particular for his publication of *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Societies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), and *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

¹⁰ Robert S. C. Gordon, *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 65. For an account of Pasolini's position towards 1968 see also David Ward, *A Poetics of Resistance: Narrative and the Writings of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), pp. 166-69, and David Ward, 'Pier Paolo Pasolini and the Events of May 1968: The "Manifesto per un Nuovo Teatro"', in *Pasolini Old and New*, ed. by Zygmunt Baranski (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), pp. 321-44. For the influence of 1968 on Pasolini's work and poetics see Simona Bondavalli, 'Lost in the Pig House: Vision and Consumption in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Porcile*', *Italica*, 3 (2010), 408-27 and Pieter Vanhove, 'Gray Mornings of Tolerance: Pasolini's *Calderón* and the Living Theatre of New York (1966-1969)', *Studi pasoliniani*, 5 (2011), 31-46.

¹¹ Pasolini, quoted in Gordon, p. 65.

¹² Pasolini, 'Il PCI ai giovani!!', pp. 1440-42.

forze dell'Ordine'.¹³ In light of this, the upheavals of 1968 would not appear as a proper revolution, but as a telluric movement intrinsic to a bourgeois mechanism of power:

Per un giovane di oggi [...] è molto difficile guardare la borghesia oggettivamente attraverso lo sguardo di un'altra classe sociale. Perché? Perché la borghesia sta trionfando, sta rendendo borghesi gli operai, da una parte, e i contadini ex coloniali, dall'altra. Insomma, attraverso il neocapitalismo, la borghesia sta diventando un'entropia. Chi è nato in quest'entropia non può in nessun modo, metafisicamente, esserne fuori.¹⁴

This quotation clarifies some aspects of the poem that were overlooked by early commentators, and instead proposes a reading of 1968 as a striking symptom of an on-going shift in the dynamics of power. Pasolini's aim is less that of attacking the students than of diagnosing an enormous social and cultural shift: the disappearance of cultures, of ways of living and protesting that are subaltern to the bourgeoisie, and thus the impossibility of envisioning practices of life external to the bourgeoisie. He describes this process through the concept of 'entropy', a notion theorized in the second law of thermodynamics which measures the degree of disorder in closed energetic systems.¹⁵ For Pasolini, by the end of the 1960s, the process of modernization which Italy is undergoing recalls an entropic phenomenon, in that it leads to a lowering of vital energies while at the same time increasing social disorder.

Pasolini's use of 'entropy' as a cultural concept describing the trajectory of modernity has a lot in common with the position of the American historian Henry Adams, who, in the early twentieth century, applied the concepts of 'entropy' to modern historiography. For Adams, the industrial revolution triggered a process of progressive increase in the chaos and disorder of societies, which he interpreted by comparing it with an entropic dynamic. Thus, according to him '[a]lthough the physicists are far from

¹³ Pasolini, 'Il PCI ai giovani!!', p. 1448.

¹⁴ Pasolini, 'Il PCI ai giovani!!', p. 1448.

¹⁵ See Rudolph Arnheim, *Entropy and Art: An Essay on Disorder and Order* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1971), p. 8.

clear in defining the term Vital Energy, and are exceedingly timid in treating of Social Energy, they are positive that the law of Entropy applies to all vital processes even more rigidly than to mechanical'.¹⁶ Going against a positive and teleological reading of 1968 as a moment of liberation, Pasolini develops a reading of the movement based on the conviction that the progression of modernization triggered an entropic course which, towards the end of the 1960s, materialized in the disappearance of traditional cultures, ways of experiencing and ways of living.

Pasolini's definition of late 1960s Italian society as entropic, and his claim that whoever is born within this 'entropy' cannot metaphysically live outside its domain, pushes us to reconsider the ideological system that had characterized the cultural debate of the Roman intellectual circles gravitating around *Nuovi argomenti* in the previous decade – from the arguments about the inclusion of peasant civilization in the democratic life of the country to those about the relationship between modernity and tradition. In observing that the bourgeoisie was triumphing because it was absorbing within its system both the working class and the 'colonized' peasants, Pasolini ratified the definitive end of those messianic ideals of social regeneration that the Italian intellectual Left, and the editorial board of *Nuovi argomenti*, had supported during the previous decade. Specifically, he dismissed the hope for an alternative conception of society based on those sectors of the population living outside the domain of the bourgeoisie. In a way, his argument represents an obituary to the idea (proposed, among others, by Rocco Scotellaro, Ernesto de Martino, Carlo Levi and Pasolini himself) that it might be possible to create a society which could include those subaltern sectors of the population, such as the 'civiltà contadina' or the 'ragazzi di vita', which lived at the margins of the bourgeois civilization. The progressive inclusion – an 'exclusive'

¹⁶ Henry Adams, *A Letter to American Teachers of History* (Baltimore: Washington Press, 1910), p. 25. The book is accessible online at <http://archive.org/stream/cu31924027762495#page/n7/mode/2up> [accessed 18 May 2013].

inclusion for Pasolini – of these sectors of the population within the bourgeois order therefore also marked the disappearance of an idea of revolution *external* to the bourgeoisie, as the students' use of the term 'revolution' appeared to demonstrate.

Pasolini's articulation of this tense historical phase in terms of entropy and of a cultural break between tradition and modernity is not an isolated example within the intellectual circle gravitating around *Nuovi argomenti*. Between 1968 and 1970 Giorgio Agamben participated in this discussion with important contributions in which he framed the period in terms of progressive disorder and detachment with tradition. Drawing in particular on Walter Benjamin's 'For a Critique of Violence' and on his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History',¹⁷ Agamben proposed an ambitious reflection on the state of arts and politics in a historical conjuncture – the one between the 1960s and 1970s – in which, as he wrote, 'possiamo dire di vivere [...] sotto la costante minaccia di una violenza che non è più oggettivamente a misura d'uomo'.¹⁸ Agamben finds in Benjamin's image of the *Angelus novus* – the Angel of history which faces a stack of ruins while moving backwards towards the future – the perfect allegory for an historical phase in which the past appears as a chaotic agglomeration of debris, as a consequence of the detachment with tradition. As Agamben writes 'La rottura della tradizione, che è per noi oggi un fatto compiuto, apre infatti un'epoca in cui fra vecchio e nuovo non c'è più alcun legame possibile, se non l'infinita accumulazione del vecchio in una sorta di archivio mostruoso o l'estraneazione operata dallo stesso mezzo che dovrebbe servire alla sua trasmissione'.¹⁹

¹⁷ Benjamin's works started to be published in Italy at the beginning of the 1960s. The first Italian anthology of his writings is Walter Benjamin, *Angelus Novus*, ed. and trans. by Renato Solmi (Turin: Einaudi, 1962). The book included translations of both 'Critique of Violence' and 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. For the study of Benjamin's reception in Italy see Girolamo De Michele, *Tiri mancini: Walter Benjamin e la critica italiana* (Milan: Mimesis, 2000).

¹⁸ Giorgio Agamben, 'Sui limiti della violenza', *Nuovi argomenti*, 19 (1970), 154-73 (p. 159).

¹⁹ Agamben, 'Sui limiti della violenza', p. 154.

6.3. 1970s Modernity: Entropic Tendencies

Pasolini's and Agamben's analyses frame the shift between the 1960s and the 1970s as a key moment in the unravelling of the project of modernization of Italian society which had begun at the end of the Second World War. This reading of Italian modernity shares a certain similarity with socio-historical interpretations of the period, both within and outside the Italian context. An example is Guido Crainz's analysis of this period in *Il paese mancato*.²⁰ Crainz maintains that the economic boom of the 1960s was a 'passive revolution' in that the Italian political class failed to govern it properly, thus wasting a great opportunity to balance the structural problems which had affected the country since its unification. Crainz frames the move from the 1970s to the 1980s as a period in which the energies produced by the phase of the 'miracolo economico' collapse into social tension, economic crisis and the progressive dissolution of hope. He then describes the 1970s in terms of a 'chiusura degli spazi',²¹ as a consequence of the Italian political class's inability to solve the imbalances of Italy's complex modernity.

Crainz's proximity to Pasolini's ideological position is notable not only in the decision to use Pasolini's photo on the cover of the book, but above all in his description of this phase of Italian history through 'entropic' images such as the shrinking of horizons, as shown by key expressions such as 'sensazione di essere alla fine di un ciclo',²² and 'drastico restringimento delle prospettive'.²³ For Crainz, even the rise of terrorism in 1970s Italy could be read as an attempt to react to the (entropic) narrowing of traditional democratic spaces which followed the end of the ideological project that had characterized the Italian reconstruction. As he writes, 'vi è qui un possibile inizio, la sensazione che spazi democratici tradizionali si chiudano, ma è in

²⁰ Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato: dal miracolo economico agli anni ottanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2003).

²¹ Crainz, p. 391.

²² Crainz, p. 439.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 442.

questo quadro che ristrettissimi gruppi iniziano a pensare alla necessità di un'organizzazione clandestina'.²⁴

Linking together Pasolini's and Crainz's framing of the shift between the 1960s and the 1970s, we could thus take 'entropy' as a theoretical marker which appropriately describes the sensation of enduring a time of emergency and experiencing a narrowing of perspectives. What seems to be at stake in 1970s Italy is therefore the possibility of envisioning an expansive idea of modernity capable of challenging the deflating and narrow mood that characterizes many accounts of this period.

However, this 'entropic' reading of modernity goes well beyond the Italian context. We might consider the work of a postmodern writer such as the American novelist Thomas Pynchon in this context.²⁵ Novels such as *The Crying of Lot '49* and *V.* portray the dynamics underlying the apparently happy and opulent American society of the 1960s as a process of progressive emptying. Structuring his stories around the concept of 'entropy', Pynchon portrayed the effects of the American postwar modernization in terms of an emptying of individual subjectivities and of increasing social disorder.²⁶ From a similar perspective, in spite of his different aim, Marshall Berman describes the 1970s as a period of narrowing of horizons and slowing down of life. For Berman, while the 1960s represented a decade of strong dichotomic tension between a violently totalitarian and a more open and pluralistic idea of modernity, the period that followed 1968 was characterized by a combination of emerging economic factors, such as inflation and stagnation, and by the subsequent energy crisis, which led to a drastic reshaping of people's collective mindscape and of their belief in progress. As a

²⁴ See Crainz, p. 391.

²⁵ For an analysis of 'entropy' in American literature see Peter Freese, *From Apocalypse to Entropy and Beyond: The Second Law of Thermodynamics in Post-War American Fiction* (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1997).

²⁶ See Thomas Pynchon, *V., A Novel* (London: Cape, 1963), and *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Picador, 1966). For the importance of entropy in Pynchon's narrative see in particular Peter L. Abernethy, 'Entropy in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*', *Critique*, 14.2 (1972), 18-33; Joseph W. Slade, 'Thomas Pynchon, Postindustrial Humanist', *Technology and Culture*, 23.1 (1992), 53-72.

consequence of this change, Berman underlines how in the 1970s everyone's vision of the modern world and its possibilities was reshaped:

Horizons for expansion and growth abruptly shrank: after decades of being flooded with energy cheap enough and abundant enough to create and recreate the world endlessly anew, modern societies would now have to learn fast how to use their diminishing energies to protect the *shrinking* resources they had and keep their whole world from running down.²⁷

While Berman, like Crainz, does not use explicitly the word 'entropy', his description of the shift between the 1960s and the 1970s through a term such as 'shrinking' – which recalls Crainz's 'drastico restringimento delle prospettive' – and his emphasis on the contrast between the 'abundant energies' of the 1960s and the 'diminishing energies' of the 1970s, signal a reversal of that process of apparently endless expansion which had characterized the 1960s. What this reversal appears to trigger is a sudden change of perspective on the meaning of modernity, whose energy and bright light seemed to have been wiped out – extinguished – thus making space for a gloomier scenery.

Berman's perspective on modernity in *All that Is Solid Melts into Air* is quintessentially American: his analysis aims to detect the change of the collective mood mainly by looking at the effects that this mutation had in the social and cultural realm of 1970s New York. While his chapter on 1960s modernity is entitled 'A Shout in the Street',²⁸ the one on the 1970s is entitled 'Bringing It All Back Home',²⁹ thus hinting at the shift from a more collective idea of political involvement to the progressive narrowing of those collective spaces. He considers the street as the most emblematic space of the postwar reconstruction phase, illustrating how this mutates into the personal and private space of the house as the most paradigmatic place of the 1970s. While Berman's analysis does not appear immediately applicable to the Italian context

²⁷ Berman, p. 330 [my emphasis].

²⁸ Berman, pp. 312-28.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 329-48.

– the Italian 1970s were a decade of intense political struggle and tensions which ranged from successful social protests and demonstrations to the tragic escalation of terrorist attacks – his framing of this period in terms of ‘loss of power’, ‘reduced mobility’ and stalling seems to share interesting parallels with the Italian case.

Moving back to Pasolini, perhaps the most evident traces of his entropic interpretation of Italian modernity can be found in an article which appeared in the *Corriere della sera* on 1 February 1975, and was originally entitled ‘Il vuoto del potere in Italia’ but later became known simply as the ‘Articolo delle lucciole’.³⁰ In this now infamous article, Pasolini described the process of modernity in Italy during the 1960s and early 1970s in terms of an ecological breaking point. For him, the disruptive force activated by the advance of modernity in Italy brought about a sort of disempowering of experience. In order to describe this collective process, Pasolini decides to use a poetical (and allegorical) image, that of the firefly. As he writes:

Nei primi anni sessanta, a causa dell'inquinamento dell'aria, e, soprattutto in campagna, a causa dell'inquinamento dell'acqua (gli azzurri fiumi e le rogge trasparenti) sono cominciate a scomparire le lucciole. Il fenomeno è stato fulmineo e folgorante. Dopo pochi anni le lucciole non c'erano più.³¹

In what follows these lines, Pasolini establishes his thesis on the ‘scomparsa delle lucciole’: political power in 1970s Italy was undergoing a mutation, an emptying, from the authoritarian, paternalistic but also ‘recognizable’ form of power which characterized first Fascist and then Christian Democrat power, to the faceless and empty power structure which characterized neo-capitalist Italy. Pasolini’s critique of neo-capitalist modernity concentrates on its process of social and identitarian dismemberment and homologation of the subaltern classes who, for the first time in history, do not seem able to resist the force generated by the Centre. With the image of

³⁰ Pier Paolo Pasolini, ‘L’articolo delle lucciole’, in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), pp. 404-11.

³¹ Pasolini, ‘L’articolo delle lucciole’, p. 405.

the disappearing fireflies Pasolini aims to theorize the advent of a different form of power, more difficult to recognize in its violence than Mussolini's fascism. This new power is, for him, an apparatus which appropriates people's bodies not through the form of a clearly authoritarian legislative power, but through homologation and normalization.

Over the years Pasolini's article has become canonical within a social and historical discourse on late twentieth-century Italy, both among those who emphasize his lucid presage of what would happen a few years later – from Craxi and Tangentopoli to Berlusconi's 'Videocracy' – and among those who interpret Pasolini simply as an apocalyptic and nostalgic intellectual, unable to come to terms with the important changes that Italy had undergone during the 1960s.³² I would argue, though, that both these perspectives fail to detect what seems to be *really* at stake for Pasolini, which is the dislocation and proliferation of power from its institutionalized locations (government, parliament, the tribunal, the school, etc.) to a less recognizable multinational web of power relations. This recognition of a shift represents the theoretical backbone of what we could define as Pasolini's 'entropic' approach to modernity; at the same time, it connects his thought to Foucault's theorization of 'biopower'.³³

The disappearance of the fireflies prompted Pasolini to address a broader process of disappearance triggered by the advancement of modernity, which includes the

³² Within the former group we can include the writer Gianni D'Elia and the journalist Giulietto Chiesa, but also politicians like Gianni Borgna and Walter Veltroni. See Gianni D'Elia, *L'eresia di Pasolini* (Milan: Effigie, 2005); Gianni D'Elia, *Il petrolio delle stragi* (Milan: Effigie, 2006); Giulietto Chiesa, 'Pasolini aveva capito tutto', *Il Fatto quotidiano*, 2 December 2011, <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/02/12/quiz-di-chi-e-la-citazione-sui-mass-media/91701/> [accessed 18 May 2013]; Gianni Borgna and Walter Veltroni, 'Chi ha ucciso Pasolini', *L'Espresso*, 18 February 2011, <http://espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio/chi-ha-ucciso-pasolini/2144956> [accessed 18 May 2013]. See also Andrea Cortellessa, 'Grandezza e miseria di un luterano corsaro', *MicroMega*, 6 (2005), 140-62; Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Radicalismo e patologia', *MicroMega*, 4 (1995), 213-20; Marco Belpoliti, *Pasolini in salsa piccante* (Parma: Guanda, 2010).

³³ For a reading of Pasolini in light of the notion of biopower and biopolitics see Roberto Esposito, *Pensiero vivente: origine e attualità della filosofia italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 2010), pp. 192-206. For a parallel reading of Pasolini's and Foucault's philosophies of life see David Ward, 'Pier Paolo Pasolini and the Events of May 1968'.

progressive fading of a range of gestures, linguistic and physical expressions or behaviour, which are replaced by a more standardized and technocratic society. On the one hand, Pasolini underlines the specificity of the Italian case, in which the violent clash between pre-modern and industrial civilizations and the incorporation of the former within the latter occurred in such a rapid progression that they simply annihilated any form of resistance to this dynamic (unlike what happened in France or Britain, for example, where this process lasted almost two centuries). On the other hand, he links this change to a mutation of power, which is only formally administered by national governments but which in truth responds to a faceless and transnational form of power which the writer defines as ‘eserciti nuovi [e] transnazionali’ or ‘polizie tecnocratiche’.³⁴

Pasolini’s argument recalls both Benjamin’s ideas of a ‘decay of the aura’ and ‘fall of experience’ in the age of technical reproduction, and Foucault’s conceptualization of technocratic power and biopolitics. Benjamin’s argument that the advent of a technological society caused a lowering of light (the ‘aura’ of the reproducible work of art, but also of the human capacity to ‘experience’ life) resonates with Pasolini’s disappearance of the fireflies, which can be read as an allegory of the fading away of a pre-modern form of light embodied by the energetic vitality of the ‘ragazzi di vita’.³⁵

³⁴ Pasolini, ‘Articolo delle lucciole’, p. 411.

³⁵ See Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by H. Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), pp. 217-52. For an analysis of the striking parallels between Pasolini and Benjamin see Filippo Trentin, ‘“Organizing Pessimism”: Enigmatic Correlations between Walter Benjamin and Pier Paolo Pasolini’, in *Modern Language Review*, forthcoming October 2013.

6.4. Entropic Rome: *Contro Roma*, *Panopticon romano* and the Redefinition of Rome's Literary Image

In the attempt to understand better the paradigm of Rome's 1970s imagery, I will now turn to an analysis of the way in which Rome became the object of attention for a number of authors who addressed its changing cityscape during this period. In particular, I will turn my attention to a group of authors who, between the 1960s and the early 1970s, dealt with Rome's modernizing process, including the literary historians Mario Praz and Eugenio Ragni, and the writer Alberto Moravia. I will do so with the aim of further articulating the hypothesis of a paradigm shift of Rome's imagery from the expanding and dilating city of the 1960s to the stagnating and entropic city of the 1970s. The period spanning the second half of the 1960s to the late 1970s, seems to be one in which writers, filmmakers, scholars and intellectuals all turn to an interrogation of Rome's modernizing trajectory, and their response to this question is markedly negative and pessimistic.

The perception of a radical discrepancy between the expanding city of the postwar period and the shrinking and gloomy Rome of the 1970s constitutes the subtext of a vast number of films, novels and essays published in this period. The dazzling and violent lights of *La dolce vita*'s Rome and of Pasolini's 'stupendous and miserable' peripheries progressively fade away, making space for the emergence of a gloomier scenario. From the 'Battle of Valle Giulia' on March 1 1968, to the bombs which exploded in via San Basilio and at the Vittoriano on December 12 1969 – the same day of the piazza Fontana bomb in Milan –, to Aldo Moro's kidnapping and murder by the Red Brigades in 1978, via the many other acts of far-right and extra-parliamentary left-wing terrorism, the murders and criminal assaults involving the Banda della Magliana, or the atrocious Circeo Massacre, 1970s Rome acted as the stage for some of the most emblematic

events that contributed to the definition of the contours of this dark and tense historical period, now known as the *anni di piombo*.³⁶ Thus, if in the 1950s and early 1960s Rome represented an ambivalent idea of urban modernity in which squalid and sublime, popular and elitist, traditional and innovative elements coexisted, as this decade progressed – and in particular after 1968 – the city came to represent a negative and somehow dystopian urban image.

Eugenio Ragni's *Roma nella narrativa italiana contemporanea* constitutes an important book for trying to grasp the contours of this specific shift of Rome's imagery, in that it tries to delineate Rome's literary physiognomy by examining its representation in a corpus of novels published between the early 1970s and the late '80s (though here, for the purpose of this discussion, I will take into consideration only those published in the early 1970s).³⁷ The volume is a collection of articles written over the course of fifteen years for the periodical *Studi romani*, in which Ragni reviewed a series of books set in Rome. What is particularly interesting in Ragni's introduction to the book is his pessimistic description of contemporary Rome; for him 'la realtà di Roma è quella che tutti, solo a voler guardarci intorno, conosciamo e soffriamo [...]. Il paesaggio romano è cambiato radicalmente, e certamente in peggio rispetto a quello che sarebbe il coefficiente atraumaticamente sopportabile di una crescita'.³⁸

³⁶ Christian Uva, Ruth Glynn, Giancarlo Lombardi and Alan O'Leary have recently shed light on the relationship between 1970s Italian terrorism and the cinematic gaze's attempt to textualize those traumatic events. See Christian Uva, *Schermi di piombo: il terrorismo nel cinema italiano* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2007); Ruth Glynn, Giancarlo Lombardi and Alan O'Leary (eds), *Terrorism, Italian Style: Representations of Political Violence in Contemporary Italian Cinema* (London: IGRS Books, 2012); and Alan O'Leary, *Tragedia all'italiana: Italian Cinema and Italian Terrorisms, 1970-2010* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011). Though by no means all of the films analysed by these critics are set in Rome, a large number of them are: from the more recent *Buongiorno, notte* (2003), *Piazza delle Cinque Lune* (2003), *Romanzo criminale* (2005) or *Il divo* (2008) to those films which during the 1970s directly or indirectly engaged with that climate of social and political tension, including Elio Petri's *Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto* (1970) as well as B-movies such as *Roma violenta* (1975), *I ragazzi della Roma violenta* (1975) and *I padroni della città* (1976). In spite of their very different themes and aims, what this corpus of films dealing with 1970s Rome testifies to is a sudden mutation of the way in which Rome is seen and represented.

³⁷ Eugenio Ragni, *Roma nella narrativa italiana contemporanea: incontri, letture, umori 1973-1987* (Rome: Editrice Spada, 1988).

³⁸ Ragni, p. 11.

Ragni's initial aim was to detect a new paradigmatic image of literary Rome, yet he recognizes the impossibility of obtaining a unitary vision of Rome from the novels he analyses. As he argues:

la realtà della Roma di oggi è tanto complessa da non poter essere abbracciata *in toto*, come in fondo era possibile fare senza eccessivo sforzo e con soddisfacente compiutezza nel secolo scorso o nella prima metà del nostro, ciascuno ritaglierà dall'insieme l'aspetto che meglio riterrà funzionale ai propri interessi o al proprio coinvolgimento morale.³⁹

According to Ragni, Rome – which until the first half of the twentieth century could still be understood in its totality – had recently undergone a series of changes which led to the impossibility of embracing it in a unitary way: modern Rome is a destructured and ephemeral entity which cannot be distinguished from any other modern location. Though one might well question Ragni's assumption that Rome, or any city, can ever be depicted '*in toto*' – are d'Annunzio's *Il piacere* or Pasolini's *Ragazzi di vita* really representative of an organic and unitary idea of Rome? – what nevertheless seems interesting in Ragni's quotation is his argument about the recent mutation of Rome into an entity that is difficult to grasp and represent. As we have already seen, this is precisely what seems at stake for Rome in the 'entropic' move from the 1960s to the 1970s.

Ragni's reviews cover a very heterogeneous corpus of novels or collections of writings which adopt Rome as their main setting. They include autobiographical writings such as Ercole Patti's *Roma amara e dolce* (1972) and Giorgio Vigolo's *Lo spettro solare* (1973); Sandro Penna's collection of stories *Un po' di febbre* (1973), which captures the faces and the characters of a humble and unofficial 1940s Rome; Libero Bigiaretti's *Dalla donna alla luna* (1972), where a neurotic protagonist wanders around a deformed and endless Rome; Gianfranco Calligarich's *L'ultima estate in città*

³⁹ Ragni, p. 13.

(1973), in which an alienating and spectral Rome represents the mirror of a generational failure; and Dario Bellezza's *Il carnefice* (1973), which records the hidden locations of homosexual Rome, described by Ragni as 'violentata e dolorante'.⁴⁰

As Ragni recognizes, these books offer a two-fold image of Rome: on the one hand they express a sense of melancholy for an idealized city rooted in the past, while on the other they frame the present city in a dystopian mode. Ercole Patti's *Roma amara e dolce* is emblematic in this regard. The novel, whose title constitutes a reference to Fellini's *La dolce vita*, opposes the image of a 'dolce Roma' – an idealized city located in the past, which can be captured only with the work of memory – with that of a 'Roma amara' – the gloomy present city. Patti underlines the discrepancy between a depressed and almost uninhabitable contemporary city, and the image of a joyful and more 'human' lost Rome. Patti's personal account of 1960s and 1970s Rome constitutes an attempt to react against the 'un-mappability' of a city which has lost at the same time its 'soul' and its urban proportions. The city that he nostalgically yearns for is 1920s Rome, when he could walk around a very compact and recognizable cityscape enclosed within the triangle composed by piazza del Popolo, piazza Venezia and piazza di Spagna:

Roma era per me tutta racchiusa in un triangolo che aveva per vertice Piazza del Popolo e si allargava fino a Piazza Venezia comprendendo Piazza di Spagna, San Silvestro, Sant'Andrea delle Fratte e tutte le traverse del Corso; una Roma raccolta nelle viuzze nei vicoletti e nei portoncini che aveva un suo odore particolare.⁴¹

As this quotation makes clear, for Patti, Rome signifies only the ancient city grouped around its most iconic central squares and roads. Patti refuses to include in his gaze any modern feature of the city, and he engages instead with the myth of the 'Roma

⁴⁰ Ragni, p. 118.

⁴¹ Ercole Patti, *Roma amara e dolce: vita di un giovane scrittore* (Milan: Bompiani, 1972), p. 37.

Sparita'.⁴² The author continually regrets the traumatic disappearance of an almost magical and familiar atmosphere as a consequence of Rome's modernization in the last few decades. As Ragni writes, everything in Patti's book 'è tramato sul ricordo e sull'accorata malinconia di una Roma ormai del tutto scomparsa'.⁴³

A similarly melancholic attitude characterizes Vigolo's *Lo spettro solare*, a collection of writings in which Rome appears as a city haunted by images of a now disappeared past which continuously flashes up in the memory of the author, overlapping with the degraded image of the contemporary city. The 'spettro solare' which gives the name to the book – and significantly 'spettro' could be interpreted as both spectrum or spectre – indicates the possibility of illuminating the present through a beam of light coming from the past. As Vigolo writes, Rome is 'sparita ormai dalla terra, come Antiochia, come Palmira, che io sento risorgere tacita intorno a me e tremare nella luce, quasi lo spettro solare di questo meriggio: la città dei miei primissimi anni; o forse chissà anteriore al mio nascervi'.⁴⁴ The Rome recalled by Vigolo is a city located in an idealized past, still untouched by traffic, the Fascist 'sventramenti' and property speculation. Like Patti, Vigolo relates to the theme of the 'Roma Sparita', a city which has physically disappeared but which can be resurrected thanks to a tireless work of recollection and memory.

Vigolo's and Patti's mournful literary accounts should not be considered isolated cases, confined to the literary examples chosen by Ragni. The lament for a compact and 'clean' image of Rome, uncorrupted by modernity and located in an idealized past, represents the symptom of a certain melancholic and almost reactionary attitude towards the Italian capital which characterizes many other accounts of this period. A clear

⁴² The myth of 'Roma Sparita' originates in a series of watercolours painted by Ettore Roesler Franz at the end of the nineteenth century, which aimed to capture scenes of a daily street life that was disappearing under the changes promoted after the city became the capital of the Italian Kingdom. See Ettore Roesler Franz, *Roma sparita: acquerelli* (Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1970).

⁴³ Ragni, p. 66.

⁴⁴ Giorgio Vigolo, *Spettro solare* (Milan: Bompiani, 1973), p. 69.

example of this attitude is Mario Praz's *Panopticon romano*, a collection of writings on Rome published in 1966, in which the Italian scholar underlines the dramatic impact that modernization had on the 'Eternal City'.⁴⁵ In the introduction to the volume Praz defines himself as 'un commosso testimonia al capezzale d'un malato grave'.⁴⁶ The 'seriously ill' patient is Rome – which appears to be suffocating under the growing traffic and the unsustainable rhythm of modern life. Praz recognizes that this destiny is shared by all the world's major cities, but he considers Rome to be more dangerously affected than other cities by the side effects of modernity, as it became a modern metropolis only after the end of the Second World War, in the space of some twenty years. Hence, for Praz, Rome's inability to adapt to modernity renders it 'una Tarpea seppellita anziché sotto gli scudi, sotto il più opprimente metallo delle automobili'.⁴⁷

As Praz puts it, Rome's problem lies in the fact that, because of its ancient history, it is not a city 'mithradized' ('mitridatizzata')⁴⁸ to modern life. For Praz, unlike other Western capitals such as Paris, New York or London, Rome did not have enough time to adapt to the requirements of modernity, and is therefore not immunized against modern life. The fact that a vast portion of the ancient city remained intact is for Praz merely a poor consolation. Even if the ancient monuments survive, he suggests, the atmosphere which once emanated from them has vanished once for all: 'rimangono i monumenti antichi, è svanita del tutto l'atmosfera che emanava da essi'.⁴⁹ Praz supports this critical vision of modern Rome with a description of Villa Albani, an enormous mansion house built in the eighteenth century for the cardinal Alessandro Albani, and located in the Nomentano quarter, between Villa Borghese and Villa Torlonia. Praz underscores that once Villa Albani was 'un appartato eliso', but now 'non c'è punto del

⁴⁵ Mario Praz, *Panopticon romano* (Naples: Ricciardi, 1966).

⁴⁶ Praz, p. v.

⁴⁷ Praz, p. v.

⁴⁸ This word refers to the old Persian king Mithridates VI, who was believed to have swallowed a little dose of poison every day in order to resist poisoning attempts by his political enemies.

⁴⁹ Praz, p. v.

parco [...] che non sia violato da coloro che s'affacciano alle finestre degli alti e dozzinali caseggiati moderni che circondano e soffocano la villa'.⁵⁰ According to Praz, what appears to have ruined the wonderful sense of seclusion of the villa is the horror of modern buildings, which obscure and suffocate its aristocratic beauty.

This dichotomic contraposition between an idealized image of the pre-modern city and a severely negative vision of the modern one characterizes all the articles collected in Praz's volume, whose themes range from an analysis of Piranesi's Roman etchings to a commentary on a series of photographic collections that document the lost monuments and areas of ancient Rome (in the tradition, again, of the 'Roma Sparita'); from a discussion of the image of Rome in the work of English and American authors (including the most famous, like Shelley, Byron, Hawthorne, but also less known ones such as Eugénie Strong) to a passionate and nostalgic description of the atmosphere of a traditional Roman tavern.

The two essays in which this sense of aristocratic disdain for modernity emerges most vividly are 'Roma sparita' and 'La seconda Roma'. In the first essay Praz compares the road traffic of mid-century Rome, when it was 'sobrio e decente', with that of the modernizing 1960s city, described as a 'metallica gazzarra'.⁵¹ In the second, he complains about the destruction of the pre-unitary city by those who planned the transformation of Rome into the capital of the Italian state. Praz underlines how 'oggi, Roma par come una bottega di antiquario in cui avessero rovesciato alla rinfusa un magazzino di mobili di Càscina; e quel che urta non è solo la grossolanità d'esecuzione delle case moderne, ma le loro proporzioni, quasi calcolate per una razza gigante'.⁵² As this quotation indicates, Praz understands Rome's modernity in terms of the jarring contrast between its past image – characterized by the harmonic fusion of high and

⁵⁰ Praz, p. vi.

⁵¹ Praz, p. 58.

⁵² Praz, p. 75.

vernacular culture – and its modern present – characterized simply by commonness and vulgarity.

Praz's descriptions of Rome as lacking an immune system (its failed 'mitridatizzazione') able to sustain its modern restructuring, his characterization of the city as a 'malato grave', or a 'Tarpea seppellita' under the steel of its automobiles, and his depiction of its modern buildings as a 'magazzino di mobili di Cäsina', indicate his complete rejection of Rome's modern image. At the same time, such a dismissive judgment betrays an aristocratic conservatism which appears not to take into account the need to provide infrastructures, roads and houses for those hundreds of thousands of immigrants who during the postwar decades moved to Rome looking for a better life. Praz's horrified reaction at the transformation of a part of Villa Albani's park into a condominium demonstrates a reactionary approach which goes beyond his subjective and aesthetic dislike for modern buildings, and rather shows a contemptuous repudiation of everything that does not stick to a purist and fixed idea of Rome's cityscape, based on classical values.

The contributors of *Contro Roma*, perhaps the most emblematic attempt to interpret Rome in the 1970s, share a similarly dismissive judgment of modern Rome.⁵³ This book, published in 1975, is a collection of articles by writers and intellectuals such as Alberto Moravia, Dario Bellezza, Libero Bigiaretti, Dacia Maraini, Eugenio Montale, Guido Piovene, Giovanni Russo, Enzo Siciliano and Giorgio Vigolo, among others. The title is already a clear indicator of the point of view of the book's contributors, who vocalize a resounding denunciation of the degraded state of 1970s Rome. The volume's introduction, written by Alberto Moravia and entitled 'Delusione di Roma', is a ferocious critique of Rome's inability to become a 'real' capital: 'Roma non è una

⁵³ Dario Bellezza et al, *Contro Roma* (Milan: Bompiani, 1975).

capitale se non di nome'.⁵⁴ In order to support this argument, Moravia lists a series of elements, dating from Italy's unification to the 1960s. However, he regards the 1960s, in particular, as a decade which acutely radicalized the city's problems: if the period of reconstruction after the war represented a moment of hope for the future destiny of Rome, as the 1960s unravelled the city underwent a process of dramatic subsidence. Like Vigolo, Patti and Praz before him, Moravia opposes the image of pre-war Rome – 'una piccola città mediterranea, quasi più piena di monumenti che di case'⁵⁵ – to the deformed and degraded image of the 1970s city:

Roma oggi appare come una slabbrata e sgangherata cittadona mediterranea, sede di uno Stato che non è uno Stato, capitale di una nazione che non è una nazione. In altri termini, Roma è l'espressione, purtroppo perfetta, del fallimento dell'Unità d'Italia.⁵⁶

Moravia mourns the loss of a city full of ancient beautiful monuments and almost empty of houses, and laments the sudden growth of peripheral areas which suffocate the historical city. He underlines how Rome's periphery, which then constituted four fifths of the entire city area, represented one of the ugliest urban fabrics of the entire world. Furthermore – in a mostly stereotypical way – Moravia describes Rome as one of the dirtiest and sloppiest European cities, invaded by hordes of vandals who decapitate statues, fill the streets with garbage and cover monuments with graffiti.

A similar, classist rejection of Rome's modern features and its peripheries emerges from other chapters of *Contro Roma*. Giovanni Russo's essay opposes the 'real' Rome – which includes the Vatican, the ancient monuments and churches, the Parliament, the cafés of piazza del Popolo or those of Via Veneto – to the modern city – an unknown world which surrounds and thus threatens the existence of the 'Eternal City'. As Russo writes:

⁵⁴ Moravia, 'Introduzione: delusione di Roma', in *Contro Roma*, pp. 7-18 (p. 15).

⁵⁵ Moravia, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Moravia, p. 14.

[Roma] oggi è un mondo sconosciuto, un'immensa plaga povera, dove baluginano le insegne al neon nelle borgate, nei quartieri della periferia che accerchiano la Roma barocca, la Roma classica, la Città del Vaticano; questa fungaia di cemento che rappresenta il grande formicaio dell'anima italiana, questa Roma delle sabbie mobili, è una Roma oppressiva nella quale lo scirocco unito allo smog sembra quasi soffocarti, stordirti.⁵⁷

In Russo's description, Rome's modern features are elements which ruin the image of the ancient city. The neon lights which characterize the peripheral areas of the city corrupt the pure layout of the central town with its baroque buildings. The new areas of the city are defined as a 'fungaia di cemento' and a 'grande formicaio', images which express a sense of disdainful dismissal for every aspect of Rome's modern development.

Similarly, Libero Bigiaretti describes Rome as 'una (brutta) città moderna con indici di affollamento e di rumorosità insopportabili che ha catturata, coinvolta nelle proprie difficoltà e carenze, soffocandola, una piccola stupenda città antica'.⁵⁸ For him, ancient Rome has nothing to do with the contemporary city, since the latter has lost any link with its traditional image. Bigiaretti's argument about the squalor of modern Rome reveals a conservative attitude to the loss of the city's pre-modern past. In a way which very evidently recalls Vigolo's and Patti's descriptions of an idealized city projected into the past, he laments the loss of Rome as a 'paesetto', the town of his youth where he could use the stairs in front of the Campidoglio as his playground.

6.5. Conclusion: Urban Dismemberments and Pre-Modern Melancholia

As we have seen in this chapter, between the 1960s and the 1970s Rome became the centre of a series of heterogeneous discourses – narrative, cinematic, social, historical and memorial – that aimed to underline the unravelling of a process of crisis and decay,

⁵⁷ Giovanni Russo, Untitled Article, in *Contro Roma*, pp. 43-56 (p. 46).

⁵⁸ Libero Bigiaretti, Untitled Article, in *Contro Roma*, pp. 87-101 (p. 99).

as well as a narrowing of horizons. If we compare these descriptions with Pasolini's and Fellini's previous attempts to come to terms with the expanding dynamic of a fast modernizing Rome in *Ragazzi di vita* and *La dolce vita*, or their desire to include within their auteuristic gaze the less predictable snapshots of the city – in particular those peripheries which, in spite of their objective degradation, still represented the most interesting sites of Rome – we cannot fail to register a clear narrowing of the observer's perspective.

As these examples appear to suggest, by the 1970s the entire trajectory of Rome's postwar development is read as an entropic process, which led to the decomposition and the dismemberment of the 'well-balanced' structure of the pre-modern city (Bigiaretti's 'paesetto felice'). As soon as the expansive trajectory of modernity mutated into a stagnant spiral, the dominant feeling seemed to become one of loss. Ragni's failed attempt to research a new identitary image for Rome; Praz's aristocratic opposition between the beauty of the classical city and the horror of the modern one; Moravia's definition of Rome as a 'capitale mancata'; and Vigolo's and Patti's attempts to recreate, at least through personal recollection, the atmosphere of a pastoral city located in a happy past – all betray an attitude of rejection of the trajectory of Rome's modernity, and a feeling of attachment for the image of an ideal city, one which had definitively disappeared. By refusing to engage with the shifting imagery of modern Rome, these writers reveal a scornful rejection of the entire process of urban and social modernization which the city underwent from the end of the Second World War onwards. The contemporary features of Rome – the high rise of the most recent buildings or the intricate knots of highways, bridges and overpasses which characterize the outer limits of the city – do not appear at all in these accounts, or, when they do, they serve only to express a sense of dreadful degradation. What this sense of rejection for modern Rome – which by now constitutes by far the larger portion of the

contemporary city – ultimately reveals is the entry of the Italian capital into a dichotomic dynamic based on a purely negative imagery of its modern experience and an idealized interpretation of its pre-modern past.

This ultimately signals the difficulty of some of the most representative Italian (and Roman) intellectuals in coming to terms with a more complex and subtle interpretation of Italy's modernity. Rome's case appears particularly interesting in this respect because, as the examples analysed in this chapter suggest, the city's modern expansion across the 1960s triggered a new sense of rejection of modernity which materialized in the emergence of an entropic image of the city. Under the pens of Moravia, Praz and Ragni, 1970s Rome appears an unknowable entity precisely because of the one-dimensional perspective of their critiques. Rome has mutated into something other than the 'Eternal City', but these authors' attitudes towards this process demonstrate the difficulty of assessing and envisioning Rome's modernity outside of a purely negative entropic dimension. In this respect, these authors' ways of engaging with Rome's modernity appear drastically different from that proposed by Levi, Fellini and Pasolini, who, as I have argued in the previous chapters, never ceased to incorporate Rome's modern features into their written or visual work.

7. The Wavering Light of Rome: Pasolini's *Petrolio*

*Non c'è mai disperazione /
senza un po' di speranza.*
Pier Paolo Pasolini

As we have seen in the previous chapter, towards the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s Rome started to be narrated and imagined in a way which visibly moved away from the double-faced paradigm provided by Pasolini's *Ragazzi di vita* and Fellini's *La dolce vita* a decade earlier. The contradictory and dialectical paradigm of the 'dilating city' which had accompanied Rome's development during the years of the economic boom – partly glamorous and vital, and partly alienated and divided – faded away leaving a void that was difficult to fill. At the same time, the progressive extinguishing of this expansive phase of Italian modernity, with its social contradictions and its glittering lights, paved the way for the formation of a gloomier and narrower imagery.

While this trajectory somehow involved Italian society as a whole, Rome and those intellectuals gravitating around its cultural circles played an essential role in defining the contours of this historical mutation. As we have seen, the Rome-based journal *Nuovi argomenti* made a substantial contribution to the recognition of the temporal split produced by the advance of modernization, underlining the symptomatic function of the 1968 movements. At the same time, and in spite of their different perspectives, aims and contexts of production, Moravia's, Ragni's and Praz's writings about the city provided literary, cultural and historical models which allow us to frame this specific shift in Rome's image within the field of 'entropy'. This further fracture of Rome's imagery, which could be labelled 'the entropic course of Rome's modernity', involved a process of definitive atrophy and breaking down of both the classical imagery of the

‘Eternal City’ and the expansive imagery produced in and by Rome in the early phases of the second postwar period, which had materialized in what I have labelled the ‘fleeting city’ of the late 1940s, and the ‘dilating city’ of the late 1950 and early 1960s.

The way in which Moravia, Ragni and Praz recorded this historical fracture is characterized by an attitude of total rejection of Rome’s modern features (literary, social, urban, cultural, architectural, etc.), which ultimately limits their ability to interpret the ramifications of this complex and problematic change. In their interpretations, the signifier ‘Rome’ acquires a twofold meaning which appears positive when linked to its ancient identity, while it is negative and even horrifying when linked to its modern one. The side effect of this anti-dialectical and Manichean approach to Rome’s modernity is a certain impenetrability of the object of analysis itself. Under the pens of these writers, modern Rome becomes an unknowable object, which can only be addressed through negation.

In order to problematize this Manichean approach, the present chapter will explore the dialectical ramifications of the entropic shift of Rome’s imagery by looking at the ways in which Pasolini’s *Petrolio* engages with it. An inquiry into Pasolini’s late engagement with Rome seems essential for two inter-related reasons. On the one hand it can provide us with a more complete understanding of the author’s relationship with Rome, which until now has been mainly focused on the city of the ‘ragazzi di vita’; on the other, it allows us to delve more deeply into the entropic shift of Rome’s imagery, which Pasolini himself helped to detect. In my reading, Pasolini’s last novel, written between 1972 and 1975 and published posthumously in 1992, represents a fluid literary organism which allows us to grasp this third paradigm shift in Rome’s postwar imagery in all its intricacies and entanglements. The entropic shift reaches its apogee here, disturbingly overlapping with the imagery of the Holocaust. However, the author’s apocalypticism, which reaches its peak in the unsettling comparison between the shape

of a Nazi swastika and the shape of Rome's urban map, is accompanied by the desire to resist the centripetal forces of the entropic movement of modernization.

The 'signifier' Rome acquires in *Petrolio* a previously unknown meaning: it incorporates the imagery of the 'Eternal City' with all its historical strata, the dialectical features of the 'stupendous and miserable' city, the unsettling urban landscape of the entropic city, and the visionary flashes which make us foresee the empty shell of the postmodern city. Thus, what I will argue is that *Petrolio*'s Rome is not simply an object of representation but also an aesthetic residue, a textual material and structural principle of this historical transition.

7.1. *Petrolio*'s Structure and Methodology of Composition: the Rational /

Irrational Divide

Pasolini's 'Articolo delle lucciole' ends with an ambiguous statement about the physiognomy of power in contemporary Italy. For Pasolini, during the 1960s, in an almost imperceptible way, power moved away from its institutional seats (the government, parliament, etc.) and mutated into something much more difficult to grasp, thus leaving a void at the core of Italy's – and of the other Western democracies' – political life. In the conclusion of the article Pasolini writes: 'Di tale "potere reale" noi abbiamo immagini astratte e in fondo apocalittiche: non sappiamo raffigurarci quali "forme" esso assumerebbe sostituendosi direttamente ai servi che l'hanno preso per una semplice "modernizzazione" di tecniche'.¹

Put briefly, in my reading *Petrolio* represents an attempt to provide form and content to these 'abstract' and 'apocalyptic' images. I will read it as an iconological archive where such images are assembled and re-ordered with the aim of capturing a snapshot

¹ Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'L'articolo delle lucciole', in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), pp. 404-11 (p. 411).

of the effects of modernization in 1970s Rome. Pasolini's perception of the difficulty of portraying reality after the advent of this new social and anthropological configuration constitutes an important step in order to understand the complex architecture of *Petrolio* and the way in which the author incorporates Rome in the text. The novel – though it would perhaps be more accurate to call it a 'project' – is not structured through the linear development of a plot with an entrance at the beginning and an exit at the end, but is rather a fragmented text with innumerable points of entrance and exit.

While my aim in this section will be to investigate the way in which *Petrolio* engages with Rome, a few introductory observations addressing the genealogy and the nature of Pasolini's last project are needed in order to try to unravel the questions which surround this startling narrative object.²

Petrolio is composed of more than twohundred sections called 'Appunti' (Notes) numbered from 1 to 133, most of which also include a title. Some of these 'Appunti' are sub-divided into categories which, with little consistency, follow either Latin ordinal numbers or the alphabetical order (the 'Appunto 3' is subdivided into 3a, 3b, 3c, etc., while the 'Appunto 6' is subdivided into 6, 6b, 6 bis, 6 ter, 6 quarter, etc.). The length of the 'Appunti' drastically varies, and goes from the 'Appunto 1' which consists of a series of suspension points and a footnote indicating that 'Questo romanzo non comincia', to the 'Appunto 55 – Il pratone della Casilina', which is thirty-one pages long. As for the coherence and the state of completion of *Petrolio*, after its appearance a

² In spite of, or perhaps because of, its incomplete state of composition, *Petrolio* is a highly debated literary text. For a complete bibliography see the references included at the end of Mondadori's most recent edition of *Petrolio* (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), pp. 651-56. Most influential to my argument are Carla Benedetti, *Pasolini contro Calvino* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998); Carla Benedetti and Maria Antonietta Grignani (eds), *A partire da Petrolio* (Ravenna: Longo, 1995); in particular the essay by Stefano Agosti, 'Opera interrotta e opera interminabile', pp. 113-20; Robert S. C. Gordon, *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), in particular the chapter 'Petrolio: Self and Form', pp. 267-92; Davide Messina (ed.), *Corpus XXX: Pasolini, Petrolio, Salò* (Bologna: CLUEB, 2012), in particular the essays Robert S. C. Gordon, 'Pasolini and the Lager Complex', pp. 29-48, Lorenzo Chiesa, 'Pasolini e l'aborto: tra biopolitica e tanatopolitica', pp. 80-95, and Manuele Gagnolati, 'Pasolini's Queer Performance: *La Divina Mimesis* between Dante and *Petrolio*', pp. 134-64; and Paolo Salerno (ed.), *Progetto Petrolio* (Bologna: CLUEB, 2006).

few critics attacked the decision to publish it, underlining the fragmentary state of the work and arguing that it was clearly an assemblage of notes rather than a proper book.³ Though undeniably the manuscript which went to print is not the final version of the book that would eventually have been published had Pasolini not been murdered at the end of 1975, it is nevertheless clear that fragmentariness and incompleteness are structural elements of *Petrolio*. Moreover, the architecture of the project appears to be perfectly consistent with the poetics of the unfinished that Pasolini developed in the last stage of his career both as a writer and as a film director.⁴

As already mentioned, *Petrolio* does not have a linear plot, but the story is set in a precise temporal arc, which stretches from the early 1950s to the early 1970s, and follows the life of Carlo Valletti, an engineer working for ENI (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi). The main setting of the story is Rome, where Carlo lives and works, but other important settings are Turin and the Middle East, respectively the place where Carlo was born and to which he sporadically returns, and the place where he operates in relation to his work as a petroleum engineer. The title *Petrolio* indicates the importance given by Pasolini to oil politics for the understanding of the position of Italy within the global map. For Pasolini, as already noted, real power moved away from the hands of politicians and political parties, and as a result a multinational energy company like ENI proved to be an interesting case study for him. The ‘Petrolio’ of the title should thus be understood as an allegory of twentieth-century neo-capitalist modernity, and it should be contextualized within the ‘ecological’ interest of the late Pasolini, as well as in relation to the energy crisis which hit the Western world precisely in those years. In light of this, the importance that he attributed to this project for an understanding of the mutation of the physics of power becomes clearer, as does his desire to unearth the

³ See, for example, Nello Ajello, ‘Povero Pasolini tradito in libreria’, *La Repubblica*, 27 October 1992, p. 35; and Dino Messina, ‘Pasolini, Ajello e “la cameriera”’, *Corriere della sera*, 1 November 1992, p. 7.

⁴ See Pier Paolo Pasolini and Jean Duflot, *Il sogno del centauro* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1983).

hidden matrix around which new forms of life materially took shape in the modernized Italy of the 1970s.

The way in which Rome becomes textual material in *Petrolio* has much to do with the points I have outlined so far in this chapter. Doubtless, the complex aesthetic structure of the book is closely related to the complex urban structure of the modernized city, and *Petrolio*'s unfinished state recalls the fluid state of Rome's topographical nature. Paolo Matteucci and Karen Pinkus have discussed this thesis in an article which highlights the strong links between *Petrolio*'s text and Rome's urban form. According to them, *Petrolio* should be studied in relation to the structure of the Italian capital, in that it 'offers a rather unique opportunity [...] for thinking postwar Rome in all its complexities, its impossibility'.⁵ The two scholars highlight how Pasolini's book does not merely represent Rome's architecture or social life, but it also captures it 'as a living poetic organism',⁶ allowing us to glimpse flashes and visions of the process of modernization that the city had undergone since the end of the war.

Contextualizing Matteucci and Pinkus's insights within the analysis proposed here, we could say that *Petrolio*, this 'living poetic organism' that mirrors Rome's modernized urban map, operates as an extremely flexible literary machinery, able to incorporate Rome's new forms. The importance of this performative act resides in the possibility of overcoming the impasse generated by the tendency to dismiss modernity common to the intellectuals and writers discussed in the previous chapter.⁷ Instead of rejecting modernity *tout court*, *Petrolio* incorporates the entropic material of modernized Rome by constantly creating channels of communication between the book's narrative structure and the city's modernized body. Those elements that had

⁵ See Paolo Matteucci and Karen Pinkus, 'The Rome of Pasolini's *Petrolio*', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 28 (2010), pp. 295-316 (p. 298), in the special issue 'Capital City, Rome 1870-2010', ed. by Cristina Mazzoni.

⁶ Matteucci and Pinkus, p. 296.

⁷ My description of *Petrolio* as a 'performative act' refers to Carla Benedetti's reading of *Petrolio* as an 'atto performativo' in Benedetti, pp. 15-16.

previously been rejected become organic to the textual fabric of this project, and Rome's modernized surface, its exhausted, debilitated and shattered cityscape, is incorporated within *Petrolio*'s flashes and visions and in its convoluted structure. In this respect, if the short film 'La sequenza del fiore di carta' allowed us to capture the moment in which the 'stupendous and miserable city' vanished, leaving a void at the core of Rome's cityscape, *Petrolio* represents the attempt to fill that empty space.

In a note written in Spring 1973, which we can now read as a sort of introduction to the published version of *Petrolio*, Pasolini describes his project as an 'edizione critica' composed of a series of fragments in search of an editor: 'L'autore dell'edizione critica "riassumerà" quindi, sulla base di tali documenti – in uno stile piano, oggettivo, grigio, ecc. – lunghi brani di storia generale, per legare fra loro i "frammenti" dell'opera ricostruita. Tali frammenti saranno disposti in paragrafi ordinati dal curatore'.⁸ *Petrolio*'s linguistic form represents a departure from Pasolini's early attempts to record, in an ethnographic fashion, the Roman dialect spoken by the *ragazzi di vita*, and is rather characterized by a grey and standardized language more similar to that used in newspaper articles, or medical reports than to the polyphonic register of novelistic narrative: 'È un romanzo, ma non è scritto come sono scritti i romanzi veri: la sua lingua è quella che si adopera per la saggistica, per certi articoli giornalistici, per le recensioni, per le lettere private o anche per la poesia'.⁹

This sort of anti-novelistic impulse goes beyond the linguistic register of the book, and involves its narrative form as well. *Petrolio* differentiates itself not only from the novelistic tradition of the nineteenth century, but from the experimental narrative of the twentieth century as well, in that it does not share the hyper-subjectivism of early modernist writers à la Joyce. Rather than losing himself in an egotistic 'stream of

⁸ Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Petrolio', in *Romanzi e racconti*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), II, pp. 1159-1832 (p. 1162).

⁹ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1826.

consciousness', Pasolini pursues a hyper-formalist and geometrically structured principle of composition which re-organizes heterogeneous narrative material (quotations from Dostoevsky and Chekov, re-writings of classical myths such as that of the Argonauts, contemporary secret dossiers on ENI, articles from magazines and newspapers, etc.) into new discursive units ('la mia decisione è quella [...] non di scrivere una storia, ma di costruire una forma [...] consistente semplicemente in "qualcosa di scritto"').¹⁰

In other words, *Petrolio*'s form appears flexible and open. It incorporates and re-organizes informative and narrative material into small units assembled together in a way which resembles more the labyrinthine structure of a project like Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* or Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities* than that of both traditional and experimental novels.¹¹ Such formalistic attention to the principle of construction, the fragmentariness and the anti-linearity of narrative, and the importance given to the moment of montage respond to a precise investigative objective, which is to capture the effects that the process of modernization had in 1970s Italy. *Petrolio* should indeed be read as that 'progetto di romanzo' of which Pasolini was talking in his article 'Il romanzo delle stragi', in that it enacts the author's willingness to:

immaginare tutto ciò che non si sa o che si tace; che coordina fatti anche lontani, che mette insieme i pezzi disorganizzati e frammentari di un intero coerente quadro politico, che ristabilisce la logica là dove sembrano regnare l'arbitrarietà, la follia e il mistero.¹²

In this respect, *Petrolio* develops through a method of composition which departs from the chronological principle of causality that characterizes traditional narrative, and rather adopts an associative (allegorical) and semiotic methodology. What appears at

¹⁰ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1343.

¹¹ See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999); and Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, trans. by Sophie Wilkins (London: Picador, 1995).

¹² Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Il romanzo delle stragi', in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, pp. 362-67 (p. 365).

stake for the author of *Petrolio* is the ability to grasp the telluric movements of history from the perspective of a particularly obscure and polarized moment of 1970s Italian history. By attempting to link together the scattered fragments of a history which has exploded into piles of debris, *Petrolio* operates within the epistemological field of the conjectural paradigm, which Ginzburg has described as:

uno strumento per dissolvere le nebbie dell'ideologia che oscurano sempre più una struttura sociale complessa come quella del capitalismo maturo. Se le pretese di conoscenza sistematica appaiono sempre più velleitarie, non per questo l'idea di totalità deve essere abbandonata. Al contrario: l'esistenza di una connessione profonda che spiega i fenomeni superficiali viene ribadita nel momento stesso in cui si afferma che una conoscenza diretta di tale connessione non è possibile.¹³

With *Petrolio*, Pasolini moves beyond the idea of systematic knowledge, as we can see from his abandonment of those forms of mimetic realism which had characterized his first novels. The linear plot, the belief in social realism, the mimetic use of language and the representation of scenes from the daily life of the Roman lower-classes are all features which disappear from its narrative structure, which is instead characterized by allegories, anti-linearity, fragmentariness, the use of standard Italian and, above all, by the attempt to intersperse the plot with heterogeneous textual and visual material. Pasolini's aim is that of 're-organizing' data in a hyper-stratified structure, based on both a rational (linear and logical) and an a-rational (anti-linear and semiotic) principle of composition, with the aim of linking together and assembling those fragments of reality that can enable us to grasp the movements of history. Fragmentariness, dissociation, schizophrenia, a-systematicity – all symptoms and traces of late capitalist modernity – enter into the structural and content fabric of *Petrolio*.

¹³ Carlo Ginzburg, *Miti, emblemi e spie* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), p. 191.

7.2. Identity Split and Urban Breaks: Carlo di Polis / Carlo di Tetis and the Dissociated Fabric of Modernized Rome

The way in which *Petrolio* textualizes Rome is strictly embedded within the open, fragmented and dissociated fabric of the 1970s city. Or better, there is a deep and intrinsic relationship between the labyrinthine structure of Rome's modernized cityscape and *Petrolio*'s complex and hyper-stratified form. What I mean is that, rather than simply being an object of representation, Rome is a structural element, a material residue of *Petrolio*'s form. It is precisely in this sense that we should understand Matteucci and Pinkus's claim that *Petrolio* 'offers a rather unique opportunity [...] for thinking postwar Rome in all its complexities, its impossibility'¹⁴: Rome is incorporated and absorbed into *Petrolio*'s form and content, into its aesthetics and its narrative.

In order to grasp the capacity and the scale of this incorporation, we should think about the process of Rome's urban growth from the 1950s to the 1970s, when its urban surface rapidly expanded, and its population came close to reaching three million inhabitants, one and a half million more than fifteen years before. Leonardo Benevolo has provided an urban-historical analysis of this process in his *Roma dal 1870 al 1990*, describing Rome's modernization as a process of collision between the hyper stratified pre-1870 city and modern attempts to rationalize and expand it.¹⁵ His central point is that Rome's historical city represented an 'illegible hieroglyphic' for its modernizers at the end of the nineteenth century, and that this inability to read the city led, during the twentieth century, to the complete detachment between the stratified and heterogeneous ancient city, on the one hand, and the incoherent and fragmentary modern city, on the other. For Benevolo, the point of fracture between central Rome – the historical city which gave rise to the myth of the 'Eternal City' – and modern Rome, occurred

¹⁴ Matteucci and Pinkus, p. 298.

¹⁵ Leonardo Benevolo, *Roma dal 1870 al 1990* (Bari: Laterza, 1992).

precisely between the 1960s and the 1970s, when ‘la città si spezza in due parti, separate e complementari’.¹⁶

Petrolio offers a series of snapshots of what Benevolo describes as an urban break between the historical and the modern city, but it does so by relocating the core of the issue from the geographical and topographical to the aesthetic and ideological dimensions. Rome in *Petrolio* remains suspended between two temporalities: the dialectical cityscape of the postwar period – what we have been calling the ‘expanding city’ – and the entropic cityscape of the 1970s. Through the visions which characterize the novel we can glimpse the process of disarticulation which the city underwent from the 1960s to the 1970s in its mutations, intersections and survivals. In other words, *Petrolio* absorbs the process of Rome’s modernization in its magmatic substance, at the same time allowing us to perceive a shifting view and a paradigm shift of Rome’s image. Here, the bright light of the ‘stupendous and miserable’ city, the African light, the porous dust and the blue skies which had characterized its image at the end of the postwar period and during the early years of the reconstruction, fade into something more sinister and darker.

Pasolini’s depiction of Rome’s urban fabric in his writing has much to do with the theme of fragmentation. Fragmentation is indeed the main structural and thematic element of *Petrolio*, and reverberates in a series of different characters and textual objects. Splits, doubles, dissociations and schizoid elements are features which characterize *Petrolio*’s plot and the architecture of the book: the identity of Carlo Valletti – who we can somehow consider the book’s protagonist – as well as Rome’s urban form. The second Note of the project is quite revealing in this respect. Here we see Carlo on the terrace of his house in the Parioli quarter of Rome, watching, oppressed by anguish, the city’s urban landscape:

¹⁶ Benevolo, p. 161.

Carlo si trovava appunto, quasi per esplorare il teatro della sua nuova esistenza, su uno di questi terrazzini. [...] Pareva che la vita nella città si fosse interrotta. Carlo, come sempre, era oppresso dall'angoscia; il non aver niente da fare se non l'occuparsi della casa [...] lo obbligava a stare solo con se stesso, come un'ombra; e quindi a recitare quella scena di solitudine di fronte al panorama di Roma.¹⁷

This scene recalls another scene which was discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. The image of Carlo Valletti looking at Rome's cityscape from his terrace in the Parioli seems to refer to the image of another Carlo, the main character of Levi's *L'orologio*, contemplating the sounds and the shadows emerging from Rome's depths ('Tendevo l'orecchio ad ascoltare, e scrutavo nel buio, sopra i tetti e le altane, in quel mondo pullulante di ombre').¹⁸ This formal relationship between the beginnings of Levi's *L'orologio* and Pasolini's *Petrolio* is however counterbalanced by the striking difference of their portrayal of Rome. While in *L'orologio* Carlo contemplates the polymorphous and arcane image of a hopeful city, whose life was starting to flow again after a traumatic war, the beginning of *Petrolio* captures the snapshot of a depressed and anguished cityscape. The excited and arcane noise of the lions' roaring which marks the beginning of Levi's novel is replaced, in *Petrolio*, by a scene of weighty solitude which reverberates in the city's panorama. Both Rome and Carlo Valletti seem burdened by a sense of oppression – 'quel Peso che egli sentiva da tutta la vita dentro di sé ("nel petto") e da cui non riusciva mai, neppure per un solo istante, a sentirsi sollevato'.¹⁹

The sense of suspension stemming from this lugubrious and weighty atmosphere leads to a key moment for the development of the story, which is Carlo's fall: 'Fu ad un tratto, così, che vide il proprio corpo cadere. [...] Giaceva tra quegli oggetti degradati, come in un nudo retrobottega; a cospetto solo del cielo che si stendeva sopra di lui'.²⁰ This event constitutes a fundamental moment for the unravelling of the story, because Carlo's fallen body becomes the object of a dispute between Tetis and Polis – two

¹⁷ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', pp. 1168-69.

¹⁸ Carlo Levi, *L'orologio* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009), p. 3.

¹⁹ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1169.

²⁰ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1169.

supra-human beings that recall the pagan gods Dionysus and Apollo. The two gods start to argue in order to win possession of Carlo's body, but in the end they find a compromise by generating another Carlo from his own body. Hence, from this moment on, Carlo will be divided into two identical personas called 'Carlo di Tetis' and 'Carlo di Polis'. The former follows his Dionysian impulses and is fully committed to the satisfaction of sexual pleasures, while the latter is the Apollonian and urbane Carlo, the ENI engineer devoted to his job and to the pursuit of power. The schizophrenic dissociation of Carlo into two figures is followed by further sexual transformations, firstly from a man to a woman, then from a woman to a man again, before the character castrates himself in an act of non-acceptance of his sexual identity.²¹

Such splits and polymorphous transformations are elements which not only characterize the individual figure of Carlo Valletti, but which also mark the structural and thematic nature of *Petrolio* itself, including the way in which Rome is portrayed in the book. Both Carlo and Rome are depicted as fractured, schizoid, and dissociated characters, which have lost their unity as a consequence of the process of modernization. While Carlo's loss of identity materializes in his identity split and later in his sexual mutations, Rome's representation is suspended between its dialectical postwar image, and its early 1970s entropic image. The progressive tearing apart of the identitarian unity of Carlo appears quite vividly in the 'Appunto 4' of *Petrolio*, which underlines the opposition between the author's father's identity and Carlo's own:

[Carlo], come ho detto, è un ingegnere: se, cioè, è abbastanza intellettuale per vivere le contraddizioni sociali e politiche del nostro tempo, non lo è abbastanza per viverle attraverso quella coscienza che assicura l'unità dell'individuo, facendo dello stato schizoide uno stato naturale dell'ambiguità, un modo di essere [...]. Come mio padre non avrebbe mai accettato di spaccarsi in due, capace anche di ammazzare – come ammazzavano i fascisti – per difendere la sua unità – così egli,

²¹ The first sexual mutation, from man to woman, occurs twice in 'Petrolio', p. 1391, and p. 1481, while the second mutation, from woman to man, happens twice in the 'Appunto 82', in which Carlo also goes to a private clinic to be castrated, p. 1468, and pp. 1774-75.

al contrario, non avrebbe mai accettato di fingere di essere uno se in realtà era spaccato in due.²²

Carlo's identitarian split into Polis and Tetis – Dionyisan and Apollonian, irrational and rational – and the narrator's comparison between Carlo's dissociation and his own father's unity, aim to describe a historical severance which occurred in Italy at some point during the second postwar period, a moment which in the previous chapter I linked to the process of social and temporal dismemberment which characterizes the country during the 1960s. The author's definition of Carlo's dissociation as a 'dissociazione storica' should indeed be understood as the psychological incorporation of the historical fracture between a traditional and paleocapitalist Italy and the technocratic Italy of the 1960s. This complex fault, which is both an individual/corporeal and a social/historical fracture, is linked to the process of economic modernization of the Italian society, which occurred between the 1950s and the 1960s, and which, according to Pasolini, led to a traumatic severance with traditional ways of existence. In other terms, Carlo becomes the vessel through which we enter this further fracture produced in Italy (and more specifically in Rome) by modernity.

Moving from Carlo's individual split to Rome's urban and historical split, similar symptoms can be noted in the 'Appunto 3d', in which we follow Carlo di Tetis through a journey within and outside Rome. In this note, the second Carlo is looking for a woman writer to whom he intends to reveal a secret ('un segreto che non poteva che essere di enorme valore pubblico, una volta rivelato').²³ In his search, he travels from north to central Rome, and then from Rome to Siracusa, where he finally finds the writer. They come back to Rome together and Carlo decides to stay with her for the

²² Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1192.

²³ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1188.

following fifteen years ('Passarono quindici anni, e Tetis le stette sempre vicino').²⁴ This 'Appunto' seems particularly interesting for our argument about Pasolini's conception of Rome's shifting imagery because it covers, in just eight pages, a temporal arc which goes from the 1960s to the early 1970s. Initially Carlo travels by bus from Parioli, a neighbourhood located in northern Rome, to the city centre:

L'autobus [...] [p]rende un gran vialone alberato, che con larghe curve, porta a un altro vialone – dritto, questo – oltre al quale un largo piazzale, il cui asfalto bolle sotto l'ardore – non dimentichiamolo – del cielo sereno, dà verso il vuoto che circonda le rive di un fiume. Un fiume dai ripidi argini pieni d'immondizia, che puzza acutamente. È tuttavia un'immondizia organica: mancano ancora completamente la plastica e il polistirolo. È solo cartaccia e merda. Imboccato il lungotevere, l'autobus lo percorre volando. Filano contro luce le facciate del quartiere dall'altra parte del fiume: un quartiere di carattere residenziale, ancora fascista. Poi cominciano le mescolanze di stili (mentre sole, torsoli, cartacce e merda restano inalterati): liberty, Novecento, prima: poi ecco il Seicento, e il Quattrocento, e il Medioevo.²⁵

The scene starts on the Lungotevere Flaminio and records the wide boulevards and squares which characterize this area of Rome, which was developed only during the first decades of the twentieth century for the emerging middle and upper classes of the Italian capital. Though located in a geographical zone and in a social realm that are very far from those of the 'borgate' depicted in *Ragazzi di vita*, this snapshot captures Rome in its contradictory beauty and dialecticity, something which Rhodes defines with the term 'poetic syncretism'.²⁶ Such syncretism materializes in the heterogeneous coexistence of different temporalities – the ancient, the medieval and the modern – and above all in Rome's squalid and smelly streets, full of garbage, and burned up by the sun, but still uncontaminated by artificial materials such as plastic and polystyrene, haunting symbols of a forthcoming neo-capitalist shift.

²⁴ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1188. The writer, who is probably inspired by Elsa Morante, will not be mentioned in any other note of *Petrolio*, and thus constitutes one of the numerous incongruities of Pasolini's unfinished book.

²⁵ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', pp. 1180-81.

²⁶ See John David Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City: Pasolini's Rome* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2007), p. 77.

A similar picture of Rome – though seen from a peripheral perspective which recalls more vividly the locations that interested the early ‘Roman’ Pasolini – emerges from Carlo’s train journey from Rome to Siracusa, in which we glimpse traces of the city’s external expansion. Rome appears here as a vast suburban territory characterized by empty and full spaces, wrecked walls, hovels and unfinished buildings:

Le case nuove non erano che misere palazzine o piccoli dadi bianchi. Piano piano, preannunciata da un caos di muraglioni scrostati, fogne scoperte, catapecchie, fabbriche appena costruite e ormai in disuso – scoperchiate – con gli scheletri di ferro contorti xxx contro la luce sempre più intensa e accecante – resti di borgatelle medioevali tra palazzoni senza un filo di verde, scoloriti e macchiati come da una divorante umidità tropicale – apparve una città sconfinata. In fondo brillava il mare. L’aria era greve di un fetore inafferrabile: merda, gas, cloache, ma anche terra concimata di orti, limoni, zolfo, e qualcosa di perduto, soffocante, xxx che non era altro che la polvere della povertà.²⁷

The viewpoint of the narrator shifts from the centre to the periphery, and this allows us to glance the new landmarks of Rome’s modernized cityscape, which appears as an endless suburban space characterized by what the narrator terms ‘the dust of poverty’, and by cheap and miserable ‘palazzine’ scattered in-between the remnants of medieval villages. The olfactory component, which constitutes an important feature of Pasolini’s description of places, represents a key element which allows us to capture the squalid, but at the same time not artificially contaminated nature of the city. The smell emanating from Rome’s peripheral recesses is a mixture of sublime and putrescent odours – natural gas and sewers but also lemons and well-tended gardens – which marks the difference between its urban landscape and the chemical smoky smell of industrial cities.

This dialectical scenery changes quite suddenly towards the end of the same ‘Appunto’, in which we skip abruptly to the Rome of the early 1970s. Here we find Carlo di Tetis still following the mysterious writer, who has in the meantime moved to a

²⁷ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1184.

more peripheral neighbourhood ('essa andò ad abitare in un bianco quartiere ai margini della città, cominciato a costruire al tempo del fascismo').²⁸ The description of this area, which recalls the topography of the EUR, constitutes a definitive departure from the synergetic and partially modernized city of the 1960s:

La sua casa era proprio accanto a una enorme chiesa – una specie di falso San Pietro tutto bianco. Davanti si stendeva la depressione su cui scorreva il giallo e sporco fiume pieno di urinali. C'era una borgata lontana, dall'altra parte, su certe alture spelacchiate, e qualche capannone, sotto, nel verde che cresceva, probabilmente sporco e polveroso, presso il fiume. Poi pian piano la città cominciò ad avvicinarsi e a incombere con lunghe, terribili fila di palazzoni, con la costruzione di nuove fabbriche tra cui una grande xxx di un'industria automobilistica del Nord, con l'invasione di macchine e di gente sempre meglio vestita e più delicata di abitudini, anche se, nel tempo stesso, sempre più volgare e quasi odiosa e ripugnante.²⁹

The perspective from which this image is taken is the house of the writer, which is located near a church described as a 'fake' and 'white' San Pietro: probably an allusion to the church of Santi Pietro e Paolo, located in the EUR neighbourhood. In just a few years the suburban landscape of Rome has changed quite drastically, and what was before a degraded but at the same time 'organic' and sublime suburban landscape has now become a toxic and corrupted scenery. The 'borgata lontana' is no longer isolated between historical remnants, but is surrounded by warehouses and factories, and the dirt and dust which characterize the city have lost their natural elements in favour of artificial and industrial ones: hangars, yellowish rivers, factories and lines of cars are the features of Rome's contemporary cityscape. The organic and spontaneous quality of post-war Rome seems to have mutated into that of a noxious and debased cityscape, and this process is linked to people's corporeal and behavioural mutation. Rome's modern areas of construction are represented as looming entities ('la città cominciò ad avvicinarsi e a incombere con lunghe, terribili fila di palazzoni'), and the people living in these areas appear repulsive, in spite of their more sophisticated habits.

²⁸ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1189.

²⁹ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1189.

7.3. Light and Fireflies in Rome

As this description suggests, the urban and anthropological splitting of modernized Rome is represented by Pasolini as a process of loss of the porous and dialectic fabric of the city. In *Petrolio*, this change can be followed through an analysis of the shifting quality of Rome's light. The bright and almost blinding light of 1960s Rome clashes with the obscurity of the 1970s city. Pasolini's gaze has always been attracted by light, and his early Rome is a city of bright and striking lights: the 'luce africana' of the 'borgate', which are always portrayed under the burning sun of the Roman summer; the exuberant light emanating from the smug characters which populate his novels and films; and the bright light which symbolizes the unravelling of historical time. As Robert Gordon has persuasively argued, light carries out a very important role in Pasolini's poetic, in that it creates an allegorical imagery which allows Pasolini to engage with and represent history's mutations.³⁰

Now, in the late phase of Pasolini's career, it is precisely this belief in the light of history which seems to fail, provoking a general disempowering of the bright quality of Rome and of the characters who inhabit it. As Georges Didi-Huberman argues in *Come le lucciole*, 'Pare proprio che nel 1975, avendo abiurato i suoi ultimi tre film e lavorando nella bolgia infernale di *Salò*, Pasolini abbia perduto la speranza in ogni impertinenza, in ogni gioia dialettica'.³¹ In order to expand Didi-Huberman's argument, it may be worth considering again Pasolini's article on the 'disappearance of the fireflies', which could also be read as a meditation on the fading nature of light, on the loss of the bright light so intrinsically embedded in his earlier worldview and in his way of writing and filming Rome. Using the allegory of the fireflies within the context of Rome, we can identify a Rome populated by glittering fireflies (the suburban Rome of

³⁰ See Gordon, *Pasolini*, in particular the chapter "'Pura Luce": A Vision of History', pp. 114-37.

³¹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Come le lucciole: una politica delle sopravvivenze*, trans. by Chiara Tartarini (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010), pp. 40-41.

Ricchetto and Ninetto, of Accattone and Mamma Roma) – and a Rome now empty of fireflies – 1970s Rome, the city contemporaneous with his article and which he represents in *Petrolino*. This opposition between the synergic and dialectical Rome of the 1960s and the entropic and toxic Rome of the 1970s has much to do with the unstable quality of the city's light and finds its point of origin precisely in the attempt to illuminate and shed light on 1970s Rome's obscure picture. *Petrolino* could indeed be read as an experiment on sight, on seeing through the dark and dim landscape of 1970s Rome.

In this regard, the 'Appunto 3a' provides a striking portrayal of Rome precisely through the description of the refracting quality of its light: 'era una giornata straordinariamente bella. [...] il sole splendeva liberamente senza che nulla si frapponesse tra la città e la sua luce'.³² This statement, which could be used to describe the beginning of *Ragazzi di vita* or *Accattone*, expresses a sense of clarity and precision irradiating from Rome's beaming cityscape. However, the image does not simply correspond to a physical characteristic of Rome's geography, but it is also functional to the unravelling of the story itself: 'la mia descrizione, sia pur sommaria di tale luce, non vale per se stessa, ma è in funzione della mia storia. Essa infatti risplendeva così gloriosamente in una mattina della fine degli Anni Cinquanta o del principio degli Anni Sessanta: ed è questo appunto il fatto rilevante, pieno di significato'.³³ In *Petrolino* the story unravels around the node of Rome's fractured temporality, and this fracture is reflected by the wavering quality of the light. The immaterial shining of the light appears therefore as a marker of historicity, of the shifting historicity of Rome's image during and after its entropic break.

The wavering character of Rome's light, and its complex connection with history's changes is perhaps *Petrolino*'s most striking characteristic. Light and Obscurity – the

³² Pasolini, 'Petrolino', p. 1175.

³³ Pasolini, 'Petrolino', p. 1175.

Rome of the fireflies and the Rome without fireflies – dialectically oppose each other without ever finding a synthesis ('Lì nella luce gli apparve una luce più forte, che lo chiamava per nome. Per analogia con la Forza Oscura, chiameremo questa nuova presenza Forza Luminosa').³⁴ In a sense *Petrolio* could be read as an iconological assemblage of visions of light, the majority of which depict or relate to Rome's urbanscape. In the novel, the materiality of Rome's image participates in a composite game of refracting colours, which range from the bright and dazzling light of the 'borgate', to the concrete grey of newly built structures, to the reddish artificial light emanating from the new slums. Evidence of this can be found, for example, through a comparison between the representation of Carlo's house and that of a 'borgata' in early 1960s Rome:

La casa di Carlo era in una palazzina grigia, con davanti un giardino che sembrava di pietra anch'esso; sempre in ombra; o in una luce grigia.³⁵

Tra le sue borgatelle di calce coi muri in foglia e le fetide baracche – ecco riapparire lo stesso sole di alcune ore prima. Lo stesso azzurro arido, la stessa luce carica dell'ultima e più esplosiva forma della vita.³⁶

Carlo's house, located in the upper-middle class neighbourhood of Parioli, is depicted as a dark and depressing building illuminated by grey light, while the shacks of the 'borgate' are lit up by dry and radiant light mirroring the vitality of the people living there, in spite of their architectonic squalor. As these two opposite pictures prove, in *Petrolio*, light has a symbolic function, and its description is always linked to a specific spatial or temporal context. In other words, the mutating refraction of light is bound to the narrator's emotional geography of Rome's cityscape, and to his reading of the city's changes through history.

³⁴ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1319.

³⁵ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1168.

³⁶ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1183.

While the narrative passage quoted above captures two coexisting images of the city in early 1960s Rome – the decorous and depressed versus the squalid and sublime one – the most striking mutation of the city’s image occurs between the 1960s and the 1970s. Such a departure materializes in the difference between the description of the area around Porta Portese in the *Appunto* 19a and the description of a peripheral area near the sea (probably Ostia or Fiumicino) in the *Appunto* 62. While the earlier *Appunto*, which is set in early 1960s Rome, records a classical snapshot of the ‘stupendous and miserable’ city, in which squalid and sublime, garbage and nature, interact with each other under the burning sun of the Roman summer, the later piece records a gloomy and obscure image of Rome:

Era una mattinata ardente di giugno. L’estate era arrivata di colpo. L’asfalto e le pietre scottavano, e all’aflore delle immondizie bruciate da un sole che più limpido e puro era impossibile immaginare, si mescolava l’odore delle piante selvatiche, che prorompevano dappertutto: tra i tuguri delle bidonvilles, tra i vecchi caseggiati del Seicento, tra le fabbrichette ammassate lungo le rive del Tevere, e, appunto, sugli argini del Tevere, che portava dentro la città il verde selvaggio e sporco della città vicina. [...] quel sole entrava dentro le cose [...]. La luce trasudava da membra povere e brune, da visi ossuti, da occhi che mandavano lampi di una nerezza famelica.³⁷

Dalle case non filtrava nessuna luce. Solo l’illuminazione stradale, molto forte, mostrava tutta la meschinità di quella contrada, che non era di gente povera, come una specie di accampamento abbandonato, dagli infissi di legno lucido e dalle pareti bianche di calce. Dopo un po’ apparve una rotonda, e, dietro di essa, il mare. Era smorto, grigio melmoso e immobile come un lago. Ma su di esso si spalancava un cielo infinito con la sua oscurità. La straordinaria limpidezza dell’aria era di nuovo scomparsa; e, se non la caligine, era discesa su tutto una tiepida foschia.³⁸

These two quotations are paradigmatic of Pasolini’s portrayal of Rome’s mutation between the 1960s and the 1970s, and his reading of this temporal shift is strictly bound to a process of lowering of light. The light of the 1960s city irradiates an intense force and vitality which stem both from its cityscape and from the people who live in this spatio-temporal dimension. This light has both a material and a metaphysical

³⁷ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1261.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 1527.

component, in that, as the author observes, it enters into people's bodies, re-emerging through their corporeal existence – their movements, posture and smiles. The second image, depicting a suburban area, emanates instead a sense of colourless and wretched existence: everything expresses an atmosphere of stagnation and impenetrability, from the houses, from which filters no light, to the sea, which appears like a grey swamp surrounded by mist.

What lies in-between the 1960s and the 1970s is what can be termed an entropic loss of the light irradiating from Rome's cityscape. However, this light is not simply a physical element stemming from a natural and artificial source, such as the sun or a street lamp, but is rather a proper 'auratic' force, linked to the unravelling of modernity. In this respect, Pasolini's philosophy of light recalls very closely Walter Benjamin's notion of the aura, which should not only be understood as an aesthetic mutation of the work of art during modernity but, as Didi-Huberman argues, as 'an originary anthropological quality in the image'.³⁹ What Pasolini aims to indicate through the obfuscation of the quality of light is precisely the loss of the aura of Rome's image, and such lowering of light also hints at the vanishing of specific forms of life which characterized the city of the 1950s and early 1960s. In other words, what disappears in the 1970s is the dialectical quality of Rome, the squalid and putrescent nature of its odours and buildings: the 'infissi di legno lucido' and the 'pareti bianche di calce' – images recalling an anonymous décor – replace the 'tuguri delle bidonvilles' and the 'verde selvaggio e sporco della città vicina' – elements indicating the porous nature of the past city.

What we can argue at this point is that the light in *Petrolio* is a marker of the author's perception of the fracture provoked by the advancement of modernity in Rome. Thus,

³⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman, 'The Supposition of the Aura: the Now, the Then, and Modernity', in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 3-18 (p. 4). For a recent discussion of Benjamin's notion of the aura see Peter Zusi, 'Vanishing Points: Walter Benjamin and Karel Teige on the Liquidation of the Aura', in *Modern Language Review*, 108.2 (2013), pp. 368-95.

by observing the oscillatory movements of Rome's light we should be able to acquire a more composite picture of its modern cityscape. There is a specific moment in *Petrolio* in which the refracting nature of the light undergoes a process of sinister re-modulation, and this occurs in Notes 71 and 72, which feature the 'Visioni del Merda'. What seems particularly relevant for the argument proposed here is that in this section Rome undergoes a process of dissociation, which quite evidently recalls Carlo's splitting into two. The image of Rome is split into two entities, the 'Scena della Reatà' and the 'Scena della Visione', which represent two different spatio-temporal dimensions of Rome itself, in that while the latter captures the contemporary image of an area of Rome, the former records a past image of the same ('la prima resta dentro la seconda, come un "doppio", coperto completamente dalla sua riproduzione').⁴⁰ In other words, the 'Scena della Realtà' is not contemporaneous with the 'Scena della Visione' and corresponds to the Rome of the early 1960s ('l'incrocio di Via Casilina con Via di Torpignattara della Visione – è quello di una volta, cioè di sei o sette anni fa').⁴¹

The difference between past and present Rome relates precisely to a difference in the quality of their light, which is shockingly sinister and artificial in the contemporary city, while it had been organic and porous in the past city. The 'Scena della Visione' is characterized by hard and rigid materials such as steel, plastic and alabaster, which do not irradiate light on their own, but are rather illuminated by a background source of artificial light ('Infatti nella Scena della Visione non c'è luce. La luce è dietro, e traspare attraverso il materiale di cui la scena è fatta, assumendo colori diversi a seconda delle tinte di materiale').⁴² At the same time, the 'Scena della Realtà' is constituted by auratic and porous features, which characterized the city's urbanscape before the late neo-capitalist shift ('le case sono bianchicce e scrostate, oppure giallastre

⁴⁰ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1562.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1558.

[...] i portoni cascanti si aprono sui piccoli androni scuri e polverosi, i marciapiedi sono slabbrati, gli alberelli si alternano stenti e zozzi ai pali della luce’).⁴³

In Pasolini’s last novel light carries out an important function, insofar as it mirrors the quality of Rome’s spatio-temporal dimension in specific periods and under specific conditions. Thus, 1960s Rome is usually depicted as a luminous and incandescent cityscape in which different strata coexist with each other: ‘il sole splendeva liberamente senza che nulla si frappesse tra la città e la sua luce. Ora, era proprio questa luce, appunto, la cosa straordinaria’;⁴⁴ ‘ben presto il sole apparve e dilagò, e alle cinque di mattina c’era già una luce meridiana’;⁴⁵ ‘Gli occhi sprizzano luce. Una luce negra, meridionale. La povertà e l’ingiustizia contro cui lottano, non li sgomentano’.⁴⁶ 1970s Rome is instead generally depicted as a lightless territory, or, when it is illuminated, its light is of a pale artificial colour, which provides the city’s atmosphere with a strident and sick feeling: ‘si spalancava un cielo infinito con la sua oscurità’;⁴⁷ ‘su tutto questo nereggiava la caligine’;⁴⁸ ‘Un pallore insano è su tutti loro, talvolta addirittura livido o cadaverico’;⁴⁹ ‘I loro occhi sono senza luce’⁵⁰.

This opposition between the bright light of 1960s Rome and the obscurity of the city in the 1970s reflects Pasolini’s argument in the ‘Articolo delle lucciole’, in which, as we have seen, he presented the disappearance of the fireflies as a consequence of Italy’s process of modernization: ‘Nei primi anni sessanta, a causa dell’inquinamento dell’aria, e, soprattutto, in campagna, a causa dell’inquinamento dell’acqua [...] sono cominciate a scomparire le lucciole. Il fenomeno è stato fulmineo e folgorante. Dopo pochi anni le

⁴³ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1563.

⁴⁴ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1175.

⁴⁵ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1186.

⁴⁶ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1624.

⁴⁷ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1528.

⁴⁸ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1500.

⁴⁹ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1579.

⁵⁰ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1579.

luciole non c'erano più. (Sono ora un ricordo, abbastanza straziante, del passato)'.⁵¹

Thus, the disappearance of the fireflies is an image which allegorically recalls the progressive dismemberment of society and its degradation, and what this disappearance provokes is a lowering of the auratic and dialectical fabric of Rome and its inhabitants.

As Georges Didi-Huberman has argued, in Pasolini's work light and fireflies should not simply be understood as narrative tropes, but they are allegorical picklocks, able to shift political thought from the discursive to the corporeal, or, in other words, from the discourse of power to that of biopower.⁵² In this respect, the distance between the bright light of 1960s Rome and the dark light of 1970s Rome aims to mirror a process of crisis of experience, and the emergence of an entropic paradigm of normalization of life, which can be visualized in those snapshots of *Petrolio* that depict the sameness of Rome's cityscape and the pale faces of the new Roman youth.

7.4. Fascist Remnants: Rome's Map and the Nazi Swastika

In the continuation of the 'Appunto 71', we follow Carlo on a journey through the Casilino neighbourhood. During this trip, which loosely recalls Dante's journey in the Inferno section of the *Divine Comedy*, Carlo witnesses the process of moral and physical degeneration of the Roman youth, which is compared to a museum of horrors ('Carlo dà un lungo sguardo contemplativo a Via xxx xxx, nella vampa della sua luce vermiglia: e vi osserva, praticamente, un museo degli orrori').⁵³ Il Merda who gives the name to this section is a young man who could be Ricetto's or Accattone's younger brother, but his corporeal existence and his way of experiencing life are completely

⁵¹ Pasolini, 'L'articolo delle lucciole', p. 405.

⁵² Georges Didi-Huberman, *Come le lucciole*, p. 18: 'La bellezza dei giovani non denota solo una semplice questione di estetica e di forma del discorso, [perché la] posta in gioco è fondamentale. Si tratta di liberare il pensiero della sua "ganga discorsiva" e di raggiungere così quel luogo cruciale in cui la politica s'incarnerebbe nei corpi, nei gesti e nei desideri di ciascuno'.

⁵³ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1566.

different from theirs. If Accattone and Riccetto, in spite of their poverty, were marked by an aura of vitality and exuberance, Il Merda is a grey figure who appears to have lost his own individuality as a consequence of his incorporation within the bourgeois universe (Il Merda is described as ‘brutto e ripugnante [...] con quegli spilocchi dietro il collo e alle basette, quei dentini gialli da sorca, quella faccia unta piena di cigolini che sembrano cacate di mosche, e quell’espressione la cui sufficienza è piena di odio contro tutto e tutti’).⁵⁴

Il Merda represents the emergence of a gentrified and homogenous society, which is here depicted as characterized by a regime of obscurity, sameness and conformism, as a consequence of the lower classes’ integration within the bourgeoisie. Such a social dynamic, which Pasolini saw materializing in a process of disappearance in which the auratic quality of gestures, language and behaviours went through a mechanism of decay, is compared by the author to a genocide: ‘Il Genocidio è compiuto. Tutti coloro che erano non ci sono più’;⁵⁵ ‘non si tratta poi neanche di un semplice cambiamento, seppur doloroso, in quanto degradante: ma si tratta, come ho detto, di un vero e proprio genocidio’.⁵⁶ In a footnote which accompanies the second quotation, Pasolini links his definition of genocide to Marx’s recognition that the advance of the capitalist market brings with itself the devaluation of human society. The connection between Marx and the advent of people’s cultural and corporeal genocide is then linked to the advent of Nazi-fascism (‘i Nuovi Giovani sono, oltre tutto, perfettamente militarizzati dallo stesso Conformismo [...] che ha già dato alle truppe delle SS’),⁵⁷ and to the imagery of the Holocaust, which, as Robert Gordon argued, represents ‘one of the defining threads of

⁵⁴ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1568.

⁵⁵ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1616.

⁵⁶ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1628.

⁵⁷ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1602.

[Pasolini's] late dystopian style'.⁵⁸ In the Appunto 72a of the 'Visioni del Merda', Pasolini even compares the conformism promoted by neo-capitalist societies to the final solution:

L'estraneità dalla classe dei ricchi è totalmente scomparsa dai loro corpi. La pasta dei corpi, che era appunto l'estraneità dalla storia ufficiale a impastare, è rimasta è vero una pasta povera, che spira scarsezza e alterità. Un nuovo destino, però, insieme a quello antico – ormai senza forze – si è dato da fare a impastare quella carne. Anziché massacrarla e cancellarla dalla faccia della terra in un genocidio cruento, ha trovato una soluzione (finale) molto più facile: rimpastarla. Eccola. Pallida e livida, con l'occhio spento, vuoto. La furberia come un pianto rappreso; il ghigno come un'implorazione, moncata sul nascere, di pietà.⁵⁹

For Pasolini, the advance of neo-capitalist modernity provoked in 1970s Italy a noticeable anthropological mutation of people's bodily existence, as he also stated in the article 'Studio sulla rivoluzione antropologica in Italia', and 'Il vero fascismo e quindi il vero antifascismo', included in *Scritti corsari*.⁶⁰ For Pasolini, neo-capitalist modernization led to a cultural and corporeal change of people, which erased their vital energy. As he writes,

mi sembra che ci siano delle buone ragioni per sostenere che la cultura di una nazione (nella fattispecie l'Italia) è oggi espressa soprattutto attraverso il linguaggio del comportamento, o linguaggio fisico [...]. Ora, *tutti* gli Italiani giovani compiono questi identici atti, hanno questo linguaggio fisico, sono interscambiabili.⁶¹

Here Pasolini's narrative enters a very delicate discursive regime where poetic description and political analysis become inseparable from each other. The description of people's bodily degradation is for Pasolini intrinsically linked to the belief that the

⁵⁸ Gordon, 'Pasolini and the Lager Complex', p. 29. For a discussion of Pasolini's political and artistic engagement with the imagery of the Holocaust see also Robert S. C. Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture 1944-2010* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 131-33. As Gordon observes, 'In Italian intellectual culture of this period, no figure embraced with more metaphysical intensity [...] the figure of the Lager than poet, film director and maverick intellectual Pier Paolo Pasolini' (p. 131).

⁵⁹ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', pp. 1616-17.

⁶⁰ Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Studio sulla rivoluzione antropologica in Italia', in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, pp. 307-12, and Pasolini, 'Il vero fascismo e quindi il vero antifascismo', in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, pp. 313-18.

⁶¹ Pasolini, 'Il vero fascismo e quindi il vero antifascismo', p. 317.

instrumental legacy of neo-capitalism produced a degraded politics of life, and that this degeneration brought about a new regime of corporeal existence detached from people's desires and pleasures.⁶² Pasolini's use of the Holocaust's imagery seems indeed to respond to an attempt to frame capitalist modernity as a devastating experience of oppression, in a way that is not dissimilar from that of the intellectuals of the Frankfurt School, or from Michel Foucault's panoptical vision of modernity. In particular, Pasolini's position with regard to modernity seems to recall Adorno and Horkheimer's recognition of a sadistic line intrinsic to the development of instrumental rationality and linked to the logic of the Enlightenment, as well as Michel Foucault's diagnosis of the shift in the nature of power during modernity, which he viewed as mutating into a process of repression of people's bodies and existences which does not occur through legislation but through normalization.⁶³

Robert Gordon has persuasively linked Pasolini's employment of the imagery of the concentration camp to a broader field of reception of the Holocaust, in Italy and beyond, during the 1960s and 1970s, defining these responses as 'markers of a generalized nadir of abjection contained as an essence within capitalist and neo-capitalist modernity'.⁶⁴ *Petrolio's* textualization of Rome is indeed deeply embedded within Pasolini's re-codification and use of the Holocaust imagery. As illustrated in the fifth chapter, Pasolini had already adopted the trope of the concentration camp in order to describe the state of degradation and exclusion of the *borgate* and the *ragazzi di vita* from the rest of Rome's social life. In *Petrolio* this comparison is stretched even further and comes to include the totality of Rome's cityscape and inhabitants. This happens at the

⁶² For a philosophical analysis of the process of bodily detachment generated by the rise of modernity see Giorgio Agamben, 'Nota sul gesto', in *Mezzi senza fine* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1996), pp. 45-53.

⁶³ I am referring to Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), and to Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), and Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79*, trans. by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁶⁴ Gordon, 'The Lager Complex', p. 31.

end of the section of the 'Visioni del Merda', in which we see Carlo on top of a cart, witnessing the transformation of Rome into an enormous swastika:

[I]l Carro giunto alla sua acme, dopo un istante di immobilità, cominciò a volare orizzontalmente: era chiaro che esso si dirigeva verso il Centro della Città. [...] Quando il Carro fu al suo zenit, sul Centro, e si fermò, tutto l'insieme della città poté essere abbracciato con un solo sguardo: la sua forma era quella – anch'essa inequivocabile – di un'immensa Croce Uncinata.⁶⁵

Here, the impossibility of capturing the totality of Rome's modernized cityscape, a recurrent refrain in *Petrolio*, is overcome by Carlo's movement from the periphery to the centre, which allows him (and us) to get a full picture of the city transformed into that of a Nazi swastika. This snapshot adds a very unsettling and threatening picture to the gallery of Rome's modernized imagery, and represents one of the most dystopian and infernal depictions of urban modernity, even beyond the case of Rome.

7.5. The Suburban Spread and the Postmodern Spatial Shift

At the same time, the need to move from the periphery to the centre in order to grasp a complete image of the city constitutes a paradigm shift of Rome's spatiality. While in his early novels, poems and films Pasolini had always adopted a peripheral and oblique gaze on the city, whereby Rome was primarily a vast suburban space located outside the postcard image of the city represented by its old centre, in *Petrolio* he enacts a shift from the periphery to the centre. The disappearance of alternative ways of living, of the porous and dialectical nature of Rome's 'borgate' and of the 'ragazzi di vita', and their spatial and anthropological integration within the centre, push the author to gain a different perspective within Rome's cityscape. The unique model of social and spatial production appears now provided by the centre: 'Il modello era ormai unico: era quello

⁶⁵ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1633.

che il centro, attraverso la stampa e la televisione, mollemente imponeva'.⁶⁶

The shift in perspective from the periphery to the centre is a paradigmatic move which could be linked to Rome's movement from a modernist to a postmodernist spatiality. What this move appears to indicate is Pasolini's recognition of the dissolution of a dichotomic relationship between the periphery and the centre, in which the first represents a site of resistance to the latter. This shift recalls the 'spatial shift' which Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault underlined in the same years when Pasolini was conceiving and writing *Petrolio*.⁶⁷ In particular, we are reminded of their argument about the impossibility of escaping power in late modernist societies, in that global and local – centre and periphery – are concepts indissolubly bound by the same dynamic of power. Pasolini's recognition of the impossibility of escaping a unilateral model of power which thus ends up normalizing the corporal and subjective life of the individual (the body of Merda and the link with Nazi-Fascism) finds an echo in Lefebvre's argument that 'power has extended its domain right into the interior of each individual, to the roots of consciousness, to the "topias" hidden in the folds of subjectivity',⁶⁸ as well as Foucault's claim that 'power is everywhere'.⁶⁹ Carlo's dissociation and Merda's neurosis could be seen as early dystopian representations of that schizophrenic subject which from the 1970s to the 1990s became the centre of attention of so many cultural theorists who contributed to the articulation of the postmodern shift.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1483.

⁶⁷ See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), and Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22-7.

⁶⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism*, trans. by Frank Bryant (New York: Saint Martin Press, 1976), pp. 86-7.

⁶⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, pp. 92-3: 'By power, I do not mean "Power" as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state [...] power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere'.

⁷⁰ Here I am proposing an interpretation of Il Merda as a type of dissociated subject which originates with the advance of late-capitalism. He could be read as a protagonist of that process of breakdown of meaning as a consequence of the signifier's capacity to signify which has been highlighted by post-structuralist thought. A brief bibliography of this topic would include Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), in particular his discussion of Lacan's notion of

This mutation of the relationship between centre and periphery is related to the emergence of a different paradigm of spatiality to that of the ‘stupendous and miserable’ city. While Rome’s peripheries in *Ragazzi di vita* and *Accattone* represented a contradictory and complex site of both marginalization and resistance, in *Petrolio* the ability to resist the centripetal force generated by the centre appears to vanish, and every space of the city, including its more marginalized zones, is ‘mappizzate’ and incorporated within Rome’s urbanscape. As written in ‘Appunto 36e’, ‘Verrà il momento che lo spazio del sogno e del viaggio sarà saturo – Ci sarà solo lo spazio del viaggio – Noi forse siamo gli ultimi, e infatti il nostro luogo è molto vicino alla realtà: alla banale mappizzazione di ogni luogo’.⁷¹ The space of 1970s Rome is indeed a saturated space where the voids that had characterized the city’s modern urbanscape progressively disappear in favour of a new landscape characterized by sameness and homogeneity. Rome’s space is now characterized by a dynamics of progressive filling of those spaces previously left out from the process of modernization, which Pasolini interprets as a process of destruction through uniformity:

la macchina lasciò la Tiburtina, e si addentrò per una strada di qua e di là della quale si stendevano grandi appezzamenti di terreno coi resti di case appena distrutte, di cui si intravedevano le forme tutte uguali [...] Poco dopo ricominciavano le case, anch’esse tutte uguali, ancora rimaste in piedi; la strada aveva una piccola salita e una piccola discesa, svoltava a sinistra tra quelle miserabili case sopravvissute alla borgata distrutta.⁷²

The empty fields of the ‘ragazzi di vita’ – those interstitial territories where they could meet, talk and walk, those spaces of resistance against the bourgeois city – now become integral parts of the cityscape of the neo-liberal city, which appears as a vast territory where the boundary between the urban and the suburban is blurred. The landscape of the postmodern cityscape recalls an entropic vision of sameness, where the urban space

schizophrenia, pp. 25-6; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), in particular the chapter ‘Postmodernism’, pp. 39-65.

⁷¹ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1331.

⁷² Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1523.

acquires the form of an immense desert which procures a sense of loss and void ('Negli enormi cortili di materiale povero, cemento spruzzato per parere marmo, mattoni che parevano finti, il vuoto era assoluto').⁷³ The space of the city envisaged by Pasolini in *Petrolio* is something which, following Edward Soja, we could define as an 'Exopolis', a spatial form 'where centrality is virtually ubiquitous and the solid familiarity of what we once knew as urban melts into air'.⁷⁴

What we can say at this point is that *Petrolio* provides us with a reading of the shapeless form of Rome's cityscape at the crossroad between modernity and postmodernity, allowing us to precociously visualize the intricate knot which lies at the core of the postmodern city, while at the same time providing us with a potential dictionary with which to interpret that 'illegible hieroglyph' which late twentieth-century Rome has become. *Petrolio* provides us with an image of Rome which was previously unknown, and in this respect this text constitutes something unprecedented in the imaginary atlas of paradigmatic images of Rome's cityscape.

7.5. Death Drive / Life Instinct and the Return of the Fireflies

As negative and apocalyptic a portrayal as *Petrolio*'s Rome may be, it does not extinguish the possibility of a return of the light. In *Petrolio*, Rome is constantly captured within the light-dark dialectic. Although the light is getting lower and the fireflies are disappearing, something can still be done in order to find a point of re-orientation in the obscure scenery of the postmodern city. There is a specific point in *Petrolio* in which such a process of reversal is performed and this occurs in the 'Appunto 99', which is one of the meta-textual digressions in which Pasolini openly discusses his authorial choices. Here the author provides a description of *Petrolio*'s

⁷³ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1765.

⁷⁴ Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and to Other Real-and-imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 239.

structure and of his methodology of work, ultimately describing his writing in relation to the death drive: ‘Nello stesso tempo in cui progettavo e scrivevo il mio romanzo [...] io desideravo *anche* di liberarmi di me stesso, cioè di morire. Morire nella mia creazione’.⁷⁵ This connection between writing and death is then supported by the description of a scene in which the author voluntarily drowns in the sea:

Mi denudai, e entrai nell’acqua, camminando faticosamente tra i sassi e gli scoglietti aguzzi: volevo arrivare là dove non si toccava, e così morire. [...] Il morire annegato in quel mare non mi dava in realtà nè piacere nè terrore: era semplicemente la sola soluzione che mi restava, un dovere da compiere senza nessuna possibilità di pentimento.⁷⁶

This scene has become one of the most revisited places of criticism on Pasolini, forming the basis for some of the most illuminating readings of *Petrolio*. In particular, Stefano Agosti has provided a psychoanalytical interpretation of this scene, highlighting the author’s death drive and his desire to disappear within his own writing: ‘la scrittura di *Petrolio* [...] attua la messa in scena della pulsione di morte e della pulsione al prima dell’origine (pulsioni che convergono nell’unica pulsione dell’autoannullamento)’.⁷⁷ According to Agosti, the writing of *Petrolio* should be interpreted as a testamentary type of writing in that it actualizes a process of ‘mantenimento-in-vita-della-morte’ of the author within the (Lacanian) symbolic order, thus allowing Pasolini’s dead body to survive within the body of the text: ‘corpo morto iscritto nel testo e, per ciò stesso, salvato, protetto, conservato nella perennità del linguaggio’.⁷⁸

Agosti’s fascinating psychoanalytical reading of Pasolini has helped to shed light on a number of important aspects of both Pasolini and *Petrolio*, revealing the author’s important consonance with post-structuralism for his emphasis on language, absence

⁷⁵ Pasolini, ‘*Petrolio*’, p. 1679.

⁷⁶ Pasolini, ‘*Petrolio*’, p. 1680.

⁷⁷ Agosti, ‘Opera interrotta e opera interminabile’, p. 119.

⁷⁸ Agosti, ‘Opera interrotta e opera interminabile’, p. 120.

and void.⁷⁹ This reading provides perhaps the most convincing and successful interpretative paradigm of Pasolini's late work, as demonstrated by the critical success that the theme of death has had within the field of Pasolini studies. We could indeed say that, from Giuseppe Zigaina to Marco Belpoliti, studying late Pasolini has also meant studying his flirtatious relationship with death and self-destruction, either in its Catholic or in its sado-masochistic forms.⁸⁰

While I agree that *Petrolio* is clearly informed by Pasolini's fascination with death, and that this aspect of the book goes hand in hand with his dystopian aesthetics, I would also argue that this tension never abandons its opposite dialectical pole – the life instinct. In this respect, Pasolini scholars appear not to follow Freud's warning to never separate death and life instincts, which are the two poles of wo/man's deepest unconscious feelings. As Freud writes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 'We started out from the great opposition between the life and death instincts. [...] If only we could succeed in relating these two polarities to each other and in deriving one from the

⁷⁹ On the relationship between language, writing and void see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), in particular the chapters 'The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing', pp. 6-26, and 'Form/Of the Supplement to the Source: The Theory of Writing', pp. 296-316; and Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Boss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), in particular the chapter 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', pp. 278-94. The relationship between writing and self-sacrifice is the focus of Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), in particular the chapter 'The Work and Death's Space', pp. 85-160. Read through the lens of Blanchot, Barthes's notion of the 'death of the author' could also be interpreted as a thesis on the disappearance of the author's within his own text, and it could thus be linked to this scene of *Petrolio*; see Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-48.

⁸⁰ For Zigaina, Pasolini organized his own death and spread traces of it in all his works, see Giuseppe Zigaina, *Pasolini e la morte* (Venice: Marsilio, 1987); *Pasolini tra enigma e profezia* (Venice: Marsilio, 1989) and *Pasolini e l'abiura, il segno vivente e il poeta morto* (Venice: Marsilio, 1993). For the relationship between death and sado-masochism in Pasolini see Marco Belpoliti, *Pasolini in salsa piccante* (Parma: Guanda, 2010); Armando Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body, Pier Paolo Pasolini from Saint Paul to Sade* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), in particular pp. 157-255; Massimo Fusillo, 'Il protagonista androgino: metamorfosi e ruoli sessuali in *Petrolio*', in *Progetto Petrolio*, ed. by Paolo Salerno, pp. 89-102; and Manuele Gragnolati, 'Queer Aesthetics and Politics in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Petrolio*', lecture given at University of Kent, 26 January 2012, online: <<http://vimeo.com/41412857>> [accessed 16 May 2013]. Emanuele Trevi has fictionalized Pasolini's sado-masochism in his novel *Qualcosa di scritto* (Milan: Ponte delle Grazie, 2012).

other'.⁸¹ Drawing on Freud's intimation, in order not to reject but rather to complicate theoretically the issue of Pasolini's death drive, I would propose a reading of *Petrolio* that integrates the life and death instincts. Only when we deliberately read in *Petrolio* the continued dialectic between these two instincts will we be able to perceive the complexity of Pasolini's gaze, and to glimpse the wavering light of the fireflies within the dark scenery of 1970s Rome.

Something of a revelation of Pasolini's life instinct is performed in the continuation of the drowning sequence, in which we see the author floating in the abysses of the sea. The passage is one of the most lyrical and important of the entire book, and as such it is worth quoting it in its entirety:

Che visione di suprema bellezza si parò davanti ai miei occhi! La luce, lì sotto era diffusa e nel tempo stesso piena come di lampi e vortici, dolcissimi, e di ombre trasparenti, che disegnavano intorno un immenso paesaggio paradisiaco. Dunque non ero, come credevo, a poche decine di metri dalla costa, ma negli abissi marini: il fondo, che le luci e le ombre accennavano fluttuando, era quello inesplorato dell'oceano. Tutto intorno a me era tiepido, oltre che morbidamente luminoso: e la respirazione era meravigliosamente facile e leggera. In quell'immensità io salivo e discendevo, facevo lenti giri su me stesso, beatamente: non potrei dire che stavo nuotando, il mio lento guizzare là dentro assomigliava piuttosto a un volo senza ali... Ecco, la mia storia è tutta qui.⁸²

In an imaginary continuation of the drowning scene we would have probably expected the author to disappear into the darkest abysses, and to die. This is not what happens, however; rather the scene shifts into one of beauty and life (surprising first and foremost the author himself). Drowning does not appear as an experience of self-annihilation, but rather as an experience of light, in which asphyxiation is replaced by an 'easy' and 'light' breathing. The death drive, which pushes the author to drown in the sea, is followed by a vision of light which symbolizes the author's life instinct, and the impossibility for Pasolini of splitting the two inner tensions of life and death. Thus,

⁸¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-74), XVIII, pp. 1-64 (p. 59).

⁸² Pasolini, 'Petrolio', pp. 1680-81.

rather than symbolizing Pasolini's nihilistic loss and his desire for self-annihilation, this scene confirms his syncretism, his contradictory and anti-hegelian dialectic, in which things remain coexistent in the reticulum of the present rather than becoming synthesized.⁸³ Pasolini suggests that the process of neo-capitalist modernization led to a dramatic lowering of the auratic force of the light and to a corporeal degradation of people's bodies, and yet that historical shift also offers us the opportunity to imagine new strategies of resistance. Thus, the disappearance of the fireflies marks less a singularly negative critique of modernity than one extreme of a broader thesis, that of the wavering nature of light, which in *Petrolio* is revealed by the narrator's ability to see light in the ocean's abyss.

Life and death instincts, darkness and illumination, hell and heaven, degradation and sublimation are poles which should never be split apart in Pasolini's work, irrespective of whether or not we opt to foreground the emergence of a dystopian imagery in *Petrolio*. As we have seen in this chapter, neo-capitalist Rome is represented as a horrendous space, characterized by an immense, homogenous and toxic periphery which has replaced the organic and informal 'borgata'. However, it is precisely at the darkest point in the book that the author reveals his strategy of resistance. This occurs at the very end of the Merda section, when Pasolini declares his desire to come to terms with the void lying at the core of the postmodern cityscape, here compared to the desert: 'Benché io sia ormai "contento del deserto", provo, a pensarci, uno di quegli spasimi che solitamente impediscono di esprimersi'.⁸⁴ It is precisely in this 'happiness with the desert' that seems to lie the other pole of Pasolini's apocalypticism, and the basis for counteracting the disappearance of the light. What we have been calling the wavering

⁸³ For an account of Pasolini's notion of dialectic, cf. Filippo Trentin, "'Organizing Pessimism": Enigmatic Correlations between Pier Paolo Pasolini and Walter Benjamin', *Modern Language Review*, forthcoming November 2013.

⁸⁴ Pasolini, 'Petrolio', p. 1628.

light of Rome seems then to represent the actualization of this ‘joy for the desert’ which takes shape in the vision of a cityscape characterized by a tremulous light:

Ora, in fondo al mare, come su un’isola, o su una penisola unita da un sottile e invisibile istmo alla terra (era Ostia? o Fiumicino? o Anzio? [...]) si intravedevano delle file di luci. Ma la lontananza era tale ch’esse sembravano un’unica luce, fatta di un infinito tremolare, in fondo al mare o in fondo al cielo. E strano, benché l’aria fosse tutta biancastra di umidità, quel piccolo grumo di luce era di color rossiccio, o rosato. Come filtrato da un’atmosfera di crepuscolo. Ora, benché ci fosse un lontanissimo, e forse solo sognato, presagio dell’alba, la notte era ancora fonda, proprio nel suo mezzo, perduta in se stessa e nel suo silenzio. Quel tremolio di luci remoto era l’unico segno di vita in tutto il mondo: laggiù si viveva, c’erano case, strade, silenzi di sonni e passaggi di macchine, forse musiche, amori: tutto senza rilievo, tutto grigio, tutto malinconico, tutto già accaduto, certo. Eppure quei lumi raggruppati e rossicci in fondo all’oscurità, testimoniavano che tutto questo era esistenza.⁸⁵

The modernized cityscape of Rome, this dark and entropic desert, appears then as the location from which one can witness the dramatic emergence of neo-capitalism, but at the same time it is also the place from which one can imagine alternative spaces. This snapshot is characterized by a high grade of dialecticity, in which the post-modernized cityscape – where everything is grey, ‘accaduto’ and ‘malinconico’ – coexists with an endlessly wavering light – ‘unica luce, fatta di un infinito tremolare’. Darkness, entropy and silence are not irreversible conditions or permanent states of being but are contingent elements which can be reversed. While Pasolini’s contemporary legacy seems bound to his uncompromising and apocalyptic attitude towards modernity, *Petrolio* opens up new perspectives bound to his attempt to ‘organize pessimism’ in a pro-active way rather than losing himself into a purely nihilistic feeling.⁸⁶

At this point we can attempt to provide a reading of *Petrolio*’s Rome as a textual surface where the development of Italy’s process of modernization comes to a standstill. *Petrolio*’s Rome foresees an interruption of that linear notion of progress which had animated the dreams of modernization of Italian democracy since the end of the Second

⁸⁵ Pasolini, ‘Petrolio’, p. 1530.

⁸⁶ Gordon states that ‘*Petrolio* draws away from annihilation and aphasia [...] and opens up prospects of new forms, new registers and new histories’. Gordon, *Pasolini*, p. 291.

World War. The book represents this shift as a process of progressive degradation and lowering of experience: the ‘ragazzo di vita’ becomes ‘Il Merda’, the lively ‘borgata’ becomes a horrible *slum* and the composite space of suburban Rome becomes a space of homogeneity and sameness in which the organic is replaced by the toxic. At the same time, however, such a dystopian and apocalyptic urbanscape intersects with the visionary effort to imagine new possibilities, strategies and histories. The attempt materializes in that complex interweaving of the death and life instincts which characterizes the drowning scene, and in the capacity to glimpse a wavering cityscape behind darkness, those ‘grumi di luce’ and ‘lumi raggrumati e rossicci’ which can be seen in the distance.⁸⁷

Thus, in *Petrolio*, the entropic cityscape of Rome begins a process of reversal which challenges the physicists’ definition of entropy as a process of total disorder. The book emphasizes the possibility of resisting disorder, conformism and homogeneity by focusing on structures of containment which characterize the micro- rather than the macro-level. In light of this, Pasolini’s last work allows us to foresee some spaces of resistance against the progression of late capitalism – possibilities that are related to Pasolini’s dialectical philosophy of death and life. What I would argue is that Pasolini’s philosophy stems directly from the modernized cityscape of Rome, and thus that the city occupies a privileged position for the understanding of the ephemeral and contingent shift from modernity to postmodernity. Thus, what we can ultimately conclude is that *Petrolio*’s incorporation and representation of Rome’s postmodern cityscape not only unveils a process of gentrification and saturation, of crisis of experience, but it also suggests the potentiality of liberating forces which can eventually

⁸⁷ Rudolph Arnheim attempts to reverse the notion of entropy as total disorder in *Entropy and Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 30: ‘Physicists speak of entropy as a tendency towards disorder when they have their minds set on the catabolic destruction of form. Gestalt theorists, on the other hand, concentrate on situations in which a disorderly or relatively less orderly constellation of forces is free and indeed compelled to become more orderly’.

return structures of order within disorder. In this respect, the ‘piccolo grumo di luce’ and the ‘lumi raggruppati e rossicci’, which appear as flashes from the margins of Rome’s postmodernized cityscape, represent the re-appearance of the fireflies, whose light, while dimmer, is still shining.

Conclusion: Rome's Modernist Archaeology

At this stage we might return to our initial questions in order to recapitulate the trajectory followed by this investigation of Rome's modernity. Can we actually conceive postwar Rome as a site of modernity? If so, what sort of trajectory can be intimated from the city's growth between the 1940s and the 1970s? Or, can we contextualize the images and the discourses produced by the conflagration between Rome (a palimpsest of clashing temporalities) and modernization (a process of historical acceleration and loss of aura) within a broader discussion of Western modernity? In order to begin to answer these questions I return briefly to Foucault, and more specifically to his description of the archaeological method of investigation.

In the fourth section of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, entitled 'Archaeological Description', Foucault starts describing his methodology of work in constructive terms rather than destructive ones.¹ As he writes:

Archaeology is much more willing than the history of ideas to speak of discontinuities, ruptures, gaps, entirely new forms of positivity, and of sudden redistribution. [...] Archaeology [...] seeks to untie all those knots that historians have patiently tied; it increases differences, blurs the lines of communication, and tries to make it more difficult to pass from one thing to another.²

For Foucault, archaeological research operates a strategic move away from the attempt to engage objects of analysis into rigidly chronological patterns. Instead of constructing causal chains that show the evolution of ideas, institutions, or political phenomena throughout the decades, archaeology focuses on their fractures and discontinuities. Nevertheless, as Foucault specifies, gaps, fractures and ruptures do not simply indicate the end of one historical period and the

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 151-218.

² Foucault, pp. 187-88.

beginning of another, they rather signal the interweaving of different temporal nodes, or indicate the coming to terms of clashing temporalities, whose disentanglement is the task of the archaeologist. Archaeology is thus a sceptical discipline which evaluates the historical object in its praxis and factuality, without immediately attempting to project it into a teleological discourse.³ Only after recognizing the swarming, disorganized and un-systematic progression of history can the researcher start re-aligning his/her material into discursive fields. Thus, in archaeological analyses, linear chronologies are supplanted by diagrams, and events' sequences by discursive formations.

Foucault uses the case study of the French Revolution to describe the modus operandi of the archaeological method:

Thus, the French Revolution [...] does not play the role of an event external to discourse, whose divisive effect one is under some kind of obligation to discover in all discourses; it functions as a complex, articulated, describable group of transformations that left a number of positivities intact, fixed for a number of other rules that are still with us, and also established positivities that have recently disappeared or are still disappearing before our eyes.⁴

What is particularly interesting in Foucault's argument is his focus on the multi-dimensionality and the inter-sectionality intrinsic in historical events. The example of the French Revolution is emblematic not as an 'origin' of a different historical course, but as a plane of intersection where different dynamics conflagrate, intersect and end up producing new temporal configurations.

Drawing on Foucault's notion of archaeology, this thesis has addressed Rome's modernity as a 'complex, articulated, describable group of transformations' that have led to a drastic reconfiguration of Rome's discursive formation and aesthetic

³ See Foucault, p. 195, in which he argues that archaeology 'disarticulates the synchrony of breaks, just as it destroyed the abstract unity of change and event, just as it destroyed the abstract unity of change and event'.

⁴ Foucault, p. 195.

morphology. I have read Rome's process of modernization as an amassment of conflicting elements generated by different temporalities which have finally collided, producing the erasure of certain elements, the survival of others and the production of entirely new sets of images, aesthetics and discourses. In my analysis, Rome's modernity surfaces as an intricate conglomerate of historical tensions that have produced a series of modernist positivities (time and crystal images, strategies of contradictions, anachronisms, dissociations, loss of aura) which in their turn have overlapped, intersected and sometimes overcome traditionalist ones (total and auratic images, classicist revivals, fascist rigidities, fixed origins, the sense of eternity and universality, etc.).

In doing so, this research has necessarily moved away from the methodology followed by literary or cinematic histories of the same period (which, in the case of Rome's modernity, are in any case almost non-existent),⁵ or from historical and cultural historical studies of contemporary Rome. One could take as an example Vidotto's *Roma contemporanea*, which, in many other aspects than methodology has been an importance point of reference for this research. Vidotto roughly divides the post-unitary history of Rome according to chronological coordinates: 1. the passage from a religious Rome to a 'secularized and liberal' one (1870 - early 1900s); 2. the emergence of 'Nathan's Rome', a period marked by the successful policies of mayor Ernesto Nathan (1907-1913); 3. fascist Rome, which is characterized by Mussolini's instrumental use of the city's classical antiquity to support fascism's neo-imperialist and colonial objectives (1922-1943); 4. the 'open city' of the war period (1943-1945); 5. the Christian

⁵ As underlined in the introduction, two analyses of Rome's literary image are Alberto Asor Rosa and Angelo Cicchetti, 'Roma', in *Letteratura italiana. Storia e geografia*, 3 vols, ed. by Alberto Asor Rosa (Turin: Einaudi, 1989), III, pp. 547-652, which covers the period from 1870 to the 1970s; and Eugenio Ragni, *Roma nella narrativa italiana contemporanea: incontri, letture, umori 1973-1987* (Rome: Editrice Spada, 1988). Both of these studies adopt a strictly chronological method of analysis. For a study of Rome's representation in cinema history see Flaminio Di Biagi, *Il cinema a Roma, guida alla storia e ai luoghi del cinema nella capitale* (Rome: Palombi Editore, 2003), which combines both a chronological and geographical analysis.

Democrat city of the reconstruction (1945-1968); 5. the disordered and highly conflictive Rome of the 1970s and 1980s; 6. the new Rome which emerges during the left-wing administrations of the 1990s and early 2000s.⁶ Thus, in Vidotto's account, Rome's recent history materializes in the intersection between its most relevant historical events and Italy's broader political changes.

Though this thesis' object of investigation and its field of research is ultimately quite different from that of Vidotto's, I would nevertheless emphasise their methodological divergence in order to shed a clearer light on the ultimate aims of this work. As already argued, instead of following the threads left by history's progression in a sequential way, this thesis has tried to capture the deployment of Rome's modernity in a plastic and dialectical way. This endeavour has materialized in the attempt to generate different planes of exploration with the aim of detecting a residue of history's movements. In other terms, my use of heterogeneous sources ranging from literature and cinema (*L'orologio*, *Petrolio*, *Roma, città aperta*, *La dolce vita*, 'La sequenza del fiore di carta', 'Toby Dammit', *Roma*) to urban history (Benevolo, Sanfilippo, Casetti), from intellectual history (journals such as *La strada*, *Rinascita*, and *Nuovi argomenti*, and collections such as *Contro Roma*) to film studies (Rhodes, Pinkus, Deleuze), from political history (Vidotto, Ginsborg, Crainz) to cultural theoretical studies on modernity (Berman, Benjamin, Didi-Huberman, Jameson), had the objective of detecting the points of fracture and the subsequent emergence of different discursive formations of modern Rome.

In this respect, it becomes important to specify what I mean by 'historical residue', in that it represents the common denominator of my archaeological analysis. What I call 'historical residue' is very similar to what Foucault defines a 'historical a priori', which for him 'must take account of statements in their dispersion, in all the flaws opened up

⁶ See the book's index in Vittorio Vidotto, *Roma contemporanea* (Bari: Laterza, 2006), pp. 523-24.

by their non-coherence, in their overlapping and mutual replacement, in their simultaneity'.⁷ Thus, what I intend by 'historical residue' is what is left of my sources that could be traced back to a common matrix once the heterogeneity and radical difference which they established with themselves are recognized. What do *L'orologio*, Rome's map in the 1940s, Deleuze's theory of the time-image, and the discourses that emerged in postwar Rome's cultural journals share in spite of their incongruities? What linked together, notwithstanding their diversity, *La dolce vita*, *Ragazzi di vita*, Rome's map in the 1950s and the articles of *Nuovi argomenti*? What, after all, kept within the same discursive field texts such as *Petrolio* and *Panopticon romano*, films such as 'La sequenza del fiore di carta' and 'Toby Dammit', and Rome's topographical space in the 1970s?

The three sections which divide this thesis represent at the same time my attempt to answer these questions, and an archaeological diagram of Rome's image from the 1940s to the 1970s. 'Fleetingness', 'Dilation' and 'Entropy' should indeed be understood as the three historical residues (or signatures) of Rome's neo-capitalist modernity.⁸ Thus, my description of post-1945 Rome as a 'fleeting' entity undergoing a process of 'return of the repressed' – something which triggers the re-emergence of the city's gutters and margins – constitutes a specific reading of the effects that the collapse of fascism and the end of the war left in Rome's imagery and cultural realm after 1945.

Then, as the immediate postwar period passed and subsequent reconstruction paved the way to a neo-capitalist model of modernity (the economic boom, migrations from the countryside to the city, urban and suburban expansion) what also varied was the way

⁷ See Foucault, p. 143.

⁸ My use of the term signature refers to Agamben's definition of it in *Signatura rerum: sul metodo* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008). Drawing on Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, Agamben argues that 'l'ambito proprio delle segnature è la storia. Qui esse appaiono col nome di "indici" ("segreti", "storici" o "temporali") o di "immagini" (*Bilder*), spesso qualificate come "dialettiche". [...] L'oggetto storico non è, cioè, mai dato in modo neutrale, ma è sempre accompagnato da un indice o da una segnature, che lo costituisce come immagine e ne determina e condiziona temporalmente la leggibilità' (p. 73-4).

in which Rome was imagined and discussed. The understanding of that Rome as ‘The Dilating City’ responds precisely to the attempt to frame the process of expansion that Rome and its image underwent during this period. As we have seen, between the 1950s and the early 1960s, the extraordinary expansion of Rome’s map was accompanied by a series of modernist images and aesthetics which materialized in the representation of contradictory spaces such as those of the ‘borgata’ and via Veneto, in Fellini’s ‘crystal images’ and Pasolini’s coagulations, and in the emergence of discourses (in particular de Martino’s), which focused on the process of temporal disarticulation produced by the advance of the industrial civilization.

Moving to the third part of my thesis, my definition of the ‘Entropic City’ aimed to categorize critical accounts that emerged from Roman cultural circles (those gravitating around *Nuovi argomenti*) and narratives of Rome (*Contro Roma*, *Panopticon romano*, ‘Toby Dammit’, ‘La sequenza del fiore di carta’, *Roma nella letteratura italiana* and *Petrolio*) under the discursive field of entropy. More specifically, what I intended to highlight was that critical tendency, from the end of the 1960s, to frame Rome as an entity characterized by entropic and dystopian features. This shift led to the formation of an alternative discursive paradigm of Rome, which accompanied and at some point supplanted the paradigm of the expanding city. 1970s Rome became thus the centre of a series of narratives which interpreted the city’s modernity in apocalyptic terms. Pasolini’s *Petrolio* constituted an important case study in the third section. In it, the divided city of the 1950s, which was characterized by a topographical, social and cultural fracture between its suburban areas (the borgate) and its city centre (the ‘Eternal City’) most clearly fades away becoming a homogenous urban surface.

At this point, the ultimate objectives of this investigation should become clearer. The decision to frame Rome 1945-1975 through the signatures of ‘fleetingness’, ‘dilation’ and ‘entropy’ aims to problematize canonical interpretations of the city’s modernity as a

one-dimensional process. In other words, this thesis challenges and ultimately tries to supplant those readings of Rome's modernity which have focused on the collapse of the 'Eternal City' (Herzfeld); those which have interpreted it as a process of destruction of a beautiful ancient town and the emergence of a horrible modern metropolis (Bigiaretti, Moravia, Patti, Vigolo); or those which have read contemporary Rome simply in light of its classical heritage (Bondanella, Bosworth).

Thus, instead of reading Rome's postwar modernity simply as a process of linear fall and the decay of the 'Eternal City', or just as the materialization of a 'Concrete Hell', this thesis imagines Rome's modernity as an overlapping series of plastic movements. We should indeed understand the city's form as undergoing three topological movements, each one accompanied by a constellation of images and discourses which ultimately lead to a reconfiguration of Rome's morphology. Thus, putting in motion the three signatures, Rome is firstly at the centre of a falling movement from the heights of the fascist city, which in turn triggers a dynamic of re-emergence of the city's gutters. Secondly, Rome undergoes a movement of expansion and proliferation which stretches its limits centrifugally. Thirdly, Rome is subjected to a movement of shrinking which provokes a mechanism of entropic stalling towards a maximum of disorder.

However, such movements should never be thought of in a sequential and causal way: the historical fractures which trigger each change of direction (downward, centrifugal and entropic) do not simply overcome the city's past images. For example, the movement towards the city's margins and gutters is a process which we see emerging in the 1940s-50s work of Ortese, Moravia, Accrocca and Levi, but that ultimately finds its literary systematization in Pasolini's work and its theoretical one in the debates on the 'peasant civilization' developed in *Nuovi argomenti*. Similarly, the apparition of an osmotic and oscillating gaze on Rome's dilating cityscape which characterizes Fellini's *La dolce vita*, was already an important feature of Levi's

L'orologio. Likewise, the eternal and universal temporality represented by ancient Rome coexists with other transient and actual images which indicate the emergence of modernist and, with *Petrolio*, postmodernist paradigms of time and space.

i. Rome 1945-1975: A Case of Coexisting (Post-)Modernity?

A latent issue that remains unresolved here is the relationship between ‘modernity’, which constitutes the theoretical backbone of this work, and ‘postmodernity’, which we have witnessed suddenly emerging in the last chapter of this thesis, in reference to Pasolini’s *Petrolio*. The attempt to define precisely the relationship between these two terms is an endeavour fraught with difficulty, and the degree of difficulty increases in the case of Rome, given its anachronistic modern chronology, the different patterns of modernization pursued by the city since its inclusion in the Italian Kingdom (outlined in the introduction), and the lack of research on Rome’s postmodernity.⁹

As I have explained in the introduction, my use of the notion of modernity refers to the post-Enlightenment (and post French Revolution) fracture of Western societies, which led to processes of rationalization of production (the rise of the bourgeoisie and of the Industrial civilization) and to the emergence of a neo-liberal paradigm of development. As Detlev Peukert has argued, ‘The central thrust of modernization may be seen as consisting in the process of industrialization that took off on a large scale around the middle of the nineteenth century, the urbanization that followed in the closing decades of the century and the social and cultural transformations that occurred as the nineteenth century was succeeded by the twentieth’.¹⁰

⁹ For a study of Rome’s postmodernity see Dom Holdaway and Filippo Trentin (eds), *Rome, Postmodern Narratives of a Cityscape* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013).

¹⁰ Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), p. 82.

As outlined in the introduction, the neo-liberal paradigm of modernization has fully emerged in Rome only after the end of the Second World War. Although some aspects of this project started to surface silently and slowly after 1870, and above all during the fascist years, the neo-capitalist paradigm really came to light in all its strength after 1945, as a consequence of Italy's integration within the Western bloc. Thus, while other European metropolises such as London and Paris went through urban, social and cultural processes of capitalist and neo-capitalist modernity in the course of more than a century, in Rome these changes occurred predominantly between the 1940s and the 1970s.

Now, if we try to contextualize Rome's modern chronology within Lyotard's and Jameson's discussions of postmodernity – which remain the two most solid and recognised interpretations of the postmodern shift – a noteworthy continuity comes up. Both Lyotard and Jameson trace back the emergence of the postmodern shift to the period of postwar reconstruction. For Lyotard, the transition to the postmodern condition 'has been under way since at least the end of the 1950s, which for Europe marks the completion of reconstruction'.¹¹ Likewise, for Jameson, 'the economic preparation of Postmodernism or late capitalism began in the 1950s, after the wartime shortages of consumer goods and spare parts had been made up'.¹² Thus, according to Jameson, the precondition of cultural postmodernism 'is to be found (apart from a wide variety of aberrant modernist "experiments" which are then restructured in the form of predecessors) in the enormous social and psychological transformations of the 1960s'.¹³

If we relate the argument proposed in this thesis and the case of Rome to Lyotard's and Jameson's interpretations of postmodernity and postmodernism, we are then forced

¹¹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 40.

¹² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. xix.

¹³ *Ibid.*

to complicate our understanding of both the notions and the chronologies of the two concepts. Read through this bifocal perspective, the examples and the case studies discussed in these thesis appear to suggest that, from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s Rome went through an interesting process of cultural development characterized by a dynamic of compression and overlapping between modernity and postmodernity. In other words, Rome seems to constitute an interesting and perhaps unique case of inclusive, coetaneous, (post-)modernity.

This aspect can be grasped by focusing on the way in which the material treated in this thesis can be contextualized within discussions of the modern/postmodern break. In this regard, we could state that the top-down movement detected in the first section of this thesis represents also a lateral movement of dislocation from the centre to the margins – in our case both Rome’s geographical city-centre and the imaginary centre represented by its classical legacy – which moreover signals a process of dissolution of the city’s traditional form. This dynamic of dislocation seems to place postwar Rome already within a trajectory towards postmodernity.

This aspect seems confirmed by an aesthetic analysis of *L’orologio*: from a literary point of view, Levi perfectly captures this movement of dissolution and decentralization of Rome’s image. By re-interpreting the meta-novelistic tradition represented by Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, *L’orologio* operates a move from the closed, formal and hypotactical towards the informal, open and paratactical, thus constituting a harbinger of the passage from modernism to postmodernism.¹⁴ Likewise, the emergence of anti-linear characteristics ascribable to the time-image (condemnation of the plot, duration in time and floatation in space, temporal thickness and overlapping, dispersive situations, etc.) indicates the materialization of a process of crisis of traditional forms which marks the movement from modernism to postmodernism.

¹⁴ See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 43.

The materialization of a paradigm of dissolution and de-centralization, which signals the intersection between modern and postmodern cultural dominants, can be extended to our other case studies too. As we have seen, by capturing Rome's dilating cityscape in the turmoil of Italy's economic boom, Fellini's *La dolce vita* provides us with a remarkable experiment in freezing and re-assembling moving images in time. The inclusion of the osmotic and mobile gaze of the photo-reporter into the cinematic camera, the proliferation of crystal-images and the unravelling of the story into a series of paratactic and fragmented sequences signal both Baudelaire's emphasis on the transient and the ephemeral as essential characteristics of modernity,¹⁵ and Harvey's belief that 'Postmodernism swims, even wallows in the fragmentary and chaotic current of change'.¹⁶ Similarly, Pasolini's depiction of 1950s Rome as a contradictory entity characterized by the coexistence of sublime and degraded features; his portrayal of the borgata as a 'space of exception' comparable to a concentration camp; his porous aesthetic, characterized by the attempt to capture Rome's expanding image through the assemblage of close ups and wide shots, are markers of a modernism which appears ready to overflow into postmodernism. In light of this, Pasolini's and Fellini's works seem indeed to symptomatize Harvey's argument that 'Fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or "totalizing" discourses (to use the favoured phrase) are the hallmark of postmodernist thought'.¹⁷

Finally, the process of crisis and decay of Rome's traditional image caused by the advance of neo-capitalist modernization becomes completely evident in the 1960s, which, as Jameson argues, represent the decisive moment for the movement from modernity to postmodernity. As we have seen, such a dynamic – which we have related to the emergence of an entropic image of Rome – finds in Pasolini's *Petrolio* its most

¹⁵ See Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *Selected Writings on Art & Artists*, ed. and trans by P. E. Charvet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 390-436.

¹⁶ Harvey, p. 44.

¹⁷ Harvey, p. 9.

complex and emblematic example. By stretching to its limits, both formally and visually, the work of fragmentation of Rome's image; by capturing the fading away of a strong opposition between centre and periphery; and by adopting a literary technique based on montage and assemblage of heterogeneous sources, *Petrolino* grasps the intricate, labyrinthine and schizophrenic structure of a city now at the very crossroad between modernity and postmodernity. After the 1970s, the latent presence of postmodern characteristics such as over-saturation, gentrification and suburban fragmentation, and the emergence of openly queer and feminist geographies of the city, will emerge very clearly.¹⁸

As these examples demonstrate, we can now try to visualize the morphology of Rome's image between the 1940s and the 1970s by linking together our case studies. From *L'orologio* to *Petrolino* through *La dolce vita*, 'Squarci di note romane' and *Ragazzi di vita*, the trajectory followed by Rome's image reveals the materialization of a fragmented, fluid and paratactic aesthetic at the crossroads between modernism and postmodernism. What this archaeological analysis of Rome ultimately demonstrates is the intrinsic relationship between the spatial changes that Rome underwent in these three decades, and the almost contemporaneous emergence of both modernist and postmodernist discourses, images and aesthetics.

¹⁸ For the emergence of an openly queer geography of Rome see the novels by Dario Bellezza, *Lettere da Sodoma* (Milan: Garzanti, 1972), *Il carnefice* (Milan: Garzanti, 1972), and *Angelo* (Milan: Garzanti, 1979); Elio Pecora, *Estate* (Milan: Bompiani, 1981). For a literary representation of Rome from a feminist perspective see Dacia Maraini, *Memorie di una ladra* (Milan: Bompiani, 1972) and *Donna in guerra* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975). The city's literary representation of Rome's suburban fragmentation is represented in Marco Lodoli, *Grande raccordo* (Milan: Bompiani, 1989). The processes of over-saturation and gentrification is analysed in reference to Bernardo Bertolucci's *La Luna* in John David Rhodes, 'Topophilia and other Roman Perversions', in *Rome, Postmodern Palimpsest of a Cityscape*, ed. by Holdaway and Trentin, pp. 79-100.

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