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*Vital Crises in
Italian Cinema*

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New Wave Neorealism: Pasolini, Olmi, Rosi

The epic films of 1960 reflected in the negative light of its moral failures the vigor with which Italian capitalism had refashioned urban life in the fifties. The scale of Fellini's ironic jeremiad, Visconti's reaffirmation of Togliattian principles, and Antonioni's dissection of the co-optation of intellectual life—here I take *L'avventura* and *La notte* as facets of a single cinematic project—indicated simultaneously an optimism about cinema's strength, as part of that industrial expansion, and an intimation of the need for what I have called baroque forms to withstand the engulfing pressure of the transformation. In fact, it would turn out that only Antonioni continued to pursue this direction; Fellini turned toward fantasy and the interrogation of his own creative history; Visconti waited until the spectacular success of Lampedusa's novel, *Il Gattopardo*, pointed a way for him to call upon his own aristocratic origins and operatic experience in a renewed critique of the historical consciousness of the Risorgimento he had attempted in *Senso*. Both the more limited scale of Antonioni's aspiration, when compared to theirs, and his assimilation of the Italian critique of the culture industry provided him with a framework for sustaining the intense energies of that historical moment throughout the early sixties in the four films he made with Monica Vitti.

In the wake of that moment a new generation of Italian filmmakers emerged who rejected the concept of the epic overview, preferring narrowly defined, regional subjects. They enjoyed freedom from the weight of

the ideological heritage of the Resistance that conditioned the way their precursors responded to the postwar changes in Italian cultural and social life, and yet they saw their cinematic options defined by the stylistic peculiarities of some of those very precursors. Even in their rejection of the baroque expansiveness of the "spettacolo dell'autore" they shared the modernist sensibilities that informed such films. Pasolini reinterpreted the postwar cinema of Rossellini; Olmi mined latent dimensions of the De Sica and Zavattini collaborations and took a great deal from Rossellini; Rosi drew upon his apprenticeship to Visconti during the filming of *La terra trema*.¹

Accattone

Writing an introduction to Fellini's *Le notti di Cabiria*, Pasolini reflected on the social history of neorealism:

Neorealism is the result of a democratic cultural reaction to the mental stagnation of the fascist period: in terms of literature that consisted of a substitution of a "decadent," hypotactic classicism ordered from above and implying a neat "stylistic distinction" oriented toward a *sublimis* style (in which realism, if it had a place, could be precious realism or the realism of genre) with a taste for paratatic reality, working documentary-like at the level of the represented reality, through a process of mimesis from which emerged the rediscovery of interior monologue, free indirect discourse, and a mixture of styles in which the *humilis* (or dialect) prevailed. At the basis of this literary renewal is a political renewal: and the Marxists—and those who would enter into discussion with them—formed an avant-garde.

The prime effect of this renewal was the reemergence of an Italy that had been hidden for twenty years: the Italy of daily life, of low life, of dialect, and lower-bourgeois Italy.

The cinema represented it first: having at its disposal all the necessary requisites for the taste of reality described above; nothing is more paratatic, mimetic, immediate, concrete, or evident than a shot. *Roma, città aperta* already had everything the essayists and aestheticians would slowly discover, theorize, and demand in ten years of study. So it turned out that necessarily in literary as well as filmic neorealism there remained a good deal of what

had been considered wiped out in a single blow as if by a miracle: you find on the neorealistic page or in the frame that there remained the fictive expansion of Pascoli's linguistics, which was really a dilation of the self, and a merely lexical enlargement of the world; there remained a populist romanticism, in the De Amicis mode, if you like, which had been imbedded in the cultural layers covered and compressed by nationalistic rhetoric; there remained by deliberate choice hermetic, or decadent and classicizing, language to the extent that the poetic was a precondition, an *a priori* lyricism in handling reality.

It is useless to delude oneself about it: neorealism was not a regeneration; it was only a vital crisis, however excessively optimistic and enthusiastic at the beginning. Thus poetic action outran thought, formal renewal preceded through its vitality (let's not forget the year '45!) the reorganization of the culture. Now the sudden withering of neorealism is the necessary fate of an improvised, although necessary, superstructure: it is the price for a lack of mature thought, of a complete reorganization of the culture.²

This critical reevaluation of neorealism in formal and rhetorical terms became the basis of Pasolini's cinematic career. He set out to explore the "paratactic, mimetic, immediate, concrete" nature of filmic imagery and to put into question the "dilation of the self," "populist romanticism," and "classicizing language" of his precursors. Pasolini's first two films, *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1963), revised Rossellini's neorealism to explore aspects of prostitution. The Merlini law of 1959 finally made prostitution a crime in Italy after decades of Vatican lobbying. The focus on that issue by parliamentary forces elicited from him an examination of the wider social context of the economics of prostitution during the "boom." Thus Pasolini's films reflect the alterations in the icon of the prostitute we would expect to see in Italian films of the sixties. The cinematic prostitute had never actually been a legalized brothel worker in the major films.³ In fact, the brief moment of near comic relief in *Ladri di biciclette* when Ricci chases the epileptic thief through a brothel, temporarily closed for a work break, is the one representation of that institution to be seen in the films discussed in this book. The Roman prostitute of *Paisà* worked out of a rented room; the streetwalker of *La dolce vita* had her own apartment, to which Marcello took Maddalena; if we are to call Gloria Perkins of *L'avventura* a prostitute, she is both a post-1959 figure and a free-lancer.

Moreover, most of the important cinematic prostitutes appear in films I have not discussed. There is a sympathetic streetwalker in Visconti's *Sessione* (1943) who seems to be the model for Andreina, the independent and gentle prostitute Aldo meets in Antonioni's *Il grido* (1957); for a great deal of Antonioni's film is an updating and psychoanalytically informed version of Visconti's pioneering work.⁴ *Il grido*'s prostitute may have gotten her name from Adriana, the narrator of Alberto Moravia's first-person novel *La romana* (*The Woman of Rome*, 1949). The author gave her the analytical skills of Defoe's Moll Flanders⁵ and the kindness of Dostoevsky's Sonia in order to refract a picture of the world of criminals, political police, and anti-Fascist students, represented by her three most regular clients, in Rome in the mid-1930s. More than any of her fictional colleagues in the cinematic tradition, Adriana is the focus of an enlarged and unhappy subjectivity that vacillates between cheerful passivity and a threatening loss of selfhood:

"My dismay used to make my flesh creep with fear; I used to shudder uncontrollably, feeling my hair stand on end, and suddenly the walls of my flat, the city and even the world seemed to vanish, leaving me suspended in dark, empty, endless space—suspended, what's more, in the same clothes, with the same memories, name and profession. A girl called Adriana suspended against nothingness. Nothingness seemed to me something terrible, solemn and incomprehensible, and the saddest aspect of the whole matter was my meeting this nothingness with the manners and outward appearance I bore in the evening when I used to meet Gisella in the confectionery shop where she waited for me. I found no consolation in the thought that other people acted and moved in just as fertile and inadequate a way as I did when faced with this nothingness, within this nothingness, surrounded by this nothingness. I was only amazed at their not referring more often to it, as usually happens when many people all at once discover the same fact."⁶

Such existential anguish, characteristic of all of Moravia's fiction, is not to be found in the Italian cinema until it surfaces, almost a decade later, in *Il grido*, where the anguish is transferred to the protagonist, Aldo. Yet even in this case, as in his earlier film *Le amiche* (1955), Antonioni undercuts the ontological vertigo by emphasizing erotic unhappiness as the motive for suicide. In *Le amiche* he even had to recast *Tra donne sole*, Pavese's novel of a successful woman's painful alienation from her working-class

origins, as a melodrama to foreground this motivation, while his visual composition, isolating figures even when they are in dialogue, smuggled the Pavesian torment of subjectivity back into the film.

Fellini's *Le notti di Cabiria* (1956) moved the icon of the good-natured and "innocent" whore from the periphery to the center of a film for the first time. In an attempt to give a more accurate picture of the world of the newly unlicensed prostitution, Fellini hired Pasolini to work on the film's dialogue. At the time Pasolini was on his way to becoming the most notorious figure of Italian cultural life, its well-publicized, hounded outsider. Born a few months before Mussolini's March on Rome, Pasolini led a dramatic and ultimately tragic life perpetually beyond the norms of Italian acceptability. He claimed that hearing a poem by Rimbaud read in school in 1938, when he was sixteen, converted him from the universal enthusiasm for Fascism. After his father was taken prisoner in Africa in 1942, he sympathized with the Azione wing of the Resistance. His more activist younger brother was a victim of the notorious massacre of Porzus, in which Communist partisans killed those of Azione in 1945. Pasolini had established a reputation as a poet and a champion of Friulian dialect writing by 1950, when he was fired from his post as a schoolteacher and expelled from the Communist party for homosexuality. He moved to Rome where he supported himself very modestly as a literary journalist (his mother, who lived with him, then had to work cleaning houses), until he began to earn more money working on film scripts.

His first major fictional work, *Ragazzi di vita* (*The Ragazzi*, 1955) was initially stopped as pornography. After a year of litigation and growing literary prestige, the tribunal relented. The interconnected stories of the *ragazzi* drew upon the author's intimacy with the subproletariat of Rome's *borgate*. In 1959 he published *Una vita violenta* (*A Violent Life*), a novel of the same milieu.

That milieu, denuded of explicit political references, constitutes the background of his first films. Fellini had offered to finance *Accattone*, but he wretched on the deal when he saw the test footage he had ordered Pasolini to show him. In a sense *Accattone* is a critique and a revision of *Le notti di Cabiria*. Accattone, whose nickname means beggar, has elevated himself to the status of a pimp when the film begins.

Fellini's Cabiria is, characteristically, the sweetest and the least sexual of the long line of generous whores in Italian cinema and literature. The pathos of her exploitation and deception ironically crosses over into the

narrative of Christian redemption that the film unfolds. Even after the man she unexpectedly met after praying at the shrine of the Madonna di Divino Amore for liberation from her profession turns out to be a thief who takes all the money she made from the sale of her beloved shack, she cannot resist the redemptive lure of music and festive people. Instead of finding the petit bourgeois paradise for which she prayed, she attains unattained Grace in the spirit of the simple-minded lay monk who earlier had offered her spiritual encouragement.

Accattone has neither Cabiria's charm nor her innocence. He will betray his own friends for a meal (somewhat like Augusto, the protagonist of Fellini's *Il bidone*); rob his baby son, whom he does not support, of a gold necklace; force his first woman (Maddalena) onto the street with a broken leg the very day he accuses her of turning in her former pimp (Ciccio), which leads to her beating and consequent arrest; and then seduce, abuse, and exploit a second (Stella) when the first goes to prison. His virtues are limited: he feeds the jailed Ciccio's wife and children after moving into her house with Maddalena, and he is sufficiently moved by the horror Stella feels, after her first night on the street, to try to support her by manual labor or by theft.

The opening titles of the film end with the Dantean quotation of Satan to the Angel of God that took Buonconte da Montefeltro's soul (*Purgatorio* 5, 106-107):

Tu te ne porti di costui l'eterno
per una lagrimetta che'l mi toglie....

You carry off with you the eternal part of him for one little tear which takes him from me....]

Where Vittorio Spinazola takes the "lagrimetta" to be Accattone's saving kindness toward Stella, I find the idea of salvation by good works runs counter to both Pasolini and Dante.⁷ The point of *Purgatorio* 5 is that Grace may come instantaneously at the final moment even of a life that had been immersed in sin. Pasolini, however, generally puts more emphasis on the moment of death than on the concept of sin. As the guarantee of meaning, death marks the conclusion of his 1967 essay, "Observations on the Sequence Shot":

It is therefore necessary to die, because so long as we live, we have no meaning, and the language of our lives (with which we express ourselves, and to which we therefore attribute the greatest importance) is untranslatable; a chaos of possibilities, a search for relations and meanings without resolution. . . . It is only thanks to death that our life serves us to express ourselves.⁸

The point at which the Dantean model intersects with this Heideggerian, or more precisely existential-ontological, idea of being-towards-death would be hagiography, the lives of the saints. And this may be a part of what Pasolini had in mind when he acknowledged early Renaissance painting and Dreyer's films as the primary sources of his cinematic style. Doubtless, the Dreyer film closest to his project was *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*). His memory of the film seems to have sheared away the intricate camera movements which articulate over and over again the figure of a circle with Joan at its center (a Boethian-Augustinian theological geometry); instead, he seized upon the monumental closeups of carefully chosen "types" and the problematic cohesion of the space they inhabit to guide what he called the "sacralità tecnica" of his own initial cinematic style.

Often Pasolini pans from one speaker to another, especially when the *ragazzi* are grouped together. Sometimes the pans describe the movement of a glance. The very frontality of the shot-counter-shot elements and the autonomy of the panning movements suggest a dissillation and an abstraction of the stylistic features of *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* without any obvious indication of their linkage to the original. Superficially the film bears a closer resemblance to Robert Bresson's films of the fifties because of the elliptical progress of its narrative—stressing significant accidents and relentlessly driving toward its culminating moment—and its use of a single, culturally prestigious musical source: here excerpts from Bach's *Passion according to St. Matthew* function as Mozart's C-minor Mass did in *Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé* (*A Man Escaped*) and Lully's music in *Pickpocket*. The obsessive use of questions and answers, which Rinaldi explores in his discussion of Accattone,⁹ may be yet another outgrowth of the influence of the interrogatory form of Dreyer's film.

In 1959 Pasolini had used a similarly skewed hagiographic model to shape his novel, *Una vita violenta*, the fictive life of Tommaso Puzilli, a

ragazzo di via who had been a thug for the neo-Fascist MSI and a day-dreamer of DC respectability before dying a Communist hero. So a year later, making his first film during the most troubling political crisis of post-war Italy—the summer of Tambroni's alliance of the DC with the extreme Right, amid urban riots and widespread fear of a coup d'état—Pasolini narrates Accattone's last days without a single overt reference to the political issues of the moment, as if despairing of any parliamentary solution to the situation of the Roman underproletariat. Instead, the idea of political action occurs only when Accattone attempts to start a conversation with Stella, the first time he meets her, referring to her work as a bottle cleaner as slavery, he says: "Lincoln freed the slaves. But in Italy they put it in place. If I had a machine gun in my hands, anyone would be lucky to be left standing!" Here this is only idle chatter. In the same passage there is a virtual repetition of the final speech of *Pickpocket*: "O Jeanne, what a strange path we took to find each other." Accattone says, "Eh, Stella, Stella . . . Indicheme er cammino!" (Ah, Stella, Stella . . . Show me the way!), adding ironically, "Insegna a 'st' Accattone qual è la strada giusta . . . pe' arrivà a un piatto de pasta e fagioli." (Teach this Beggar the right way . . . to get to a plate of pasta and beans.)¹⁰

Fifteen years later Pasolini recognized two ways in which the film pointed to the "perfect . . . continuity between the Fascist regime and the Christian Democrat regime": the ghettoization of the subproletariat and the criminal violence of the police.¹¹ Actually Pasolini's most "political" gesture was to relocate the genre of the spiritual biography of the late 1950s (*Il bidone*, *Wild Strawberries*, *Pickpocket*) outside of the middle class. *Le notti di Cabiria* may have anticipated this, but Fellini gave his heroine middle-class values and virtues; in short, he transposed her and her world into the framework and the ideology of the spiritual biography. Pasolini's more startling achievement was to deploy the genre without altering the world and values of the criminal underproletariat.

On the most elementary level, this transposition began with the casting of the film. In fact, one of the impetuses driving Pasolini toward filmmaking was his frustration with the use of actors to play the *ragazzi* in two of the films he wrote for Mauro Bolognini, *La notte brava* (*The Good Night*, 1959) and *La giornata balorda* (*A Dull Day's Work*, 1960), according to his collaborator and informant on Roman dialect and slum life, Sergio Citti.¹² Citti's brother, Franco, played Accattone, and his friends

from the *borgate* played the other *ragazzi*. As a first step toward his "sacralità tecnica" this form of typecasting repeated a principle of neorealism, and to some extent a strategy of both Dreyer and Bresson.

The predominance of outdoor cinematography in urban locations, coupled with a distinctively stylized repertoire of compositional and montage strategies that give the illusion of immediacy and simplicity, also distances Accattone from the norms of the ambitious Italian films of the late 1950s in ways that suggest a refashioning of neorealism without actually repeating the tropes of films from the 1940s. Pasolini claimed he used only the middle range 50mm and 70mm lenses to "add weight to matter, highlight the depth and the light and shadow,"¹³ but there are clearly some minimal zoom movements in the finished film. Perhaps he meant that he never took advantage of the wide-angle and telephoto options of the zoom. When he told his cameraman, Tonino Delli Colli, that he wanted the image "sgranata," which could mean "open-eyed" or "peeled,"¹⁴ Delli Colli used a "hard" film stock from Ferrania and emphasized contrast and grain by printing a dupe negative from the original master. Such rawness plays up the difference between the texture of *Accattone* and the studio polish of *La dolce vita* and the nuanced luminosity of Scavarda's images for *L'avventura*.

But just as striking were the unfamiliar cityscapes of the Roman *borgate* in the brutal summer sun. Pasolini described the shooting conditions: "Those were stupendous days when summer was still burning in its purest form, and indoors there was hardly a lessening of its fury. Via Fanfulla da Lodi, in the middle of Pigneto, with low shacks, peeling walls, there was a granular magnitude in its extreme meanness; a poor, humble, unknown alley, lost under the sun in a Rome that wasn't Rome."¹⁵ Pasolini punctuated this vision of an unknown Rome with a series of remarkable images: Accattone's dive from the bridge with statues of angels; his drunken, wet face covered with sand, as if in premonition of his burial; his wearing a woman's hat and placing a basket on Fulvio's head; naked babies outside the cemetery; the thieves laughing themselves sick on the curb over Car-tagine's stinking feet. The film proceeds through a series of gestural moments, consciously modeled on the fresco panels of the great Florentine masters of the early Renaissance, whom Pasolini studied under the distinguished scholar Roberto Longhi.

The intense summer light takes on *thematic* importance in Accattone's dream: after following a funeral procession which turns out to be his own,

he is barred from entering the cemetery. When he scales the wall, he finds only an old grave digger preparing a plot for him in the shade of a tree. He talks him into digging a little farther away so that he will lie in the light. If we take this onerous desire for light as the "Igrimetta" that saves Accattone's soul, then the "sacralità tecnica" of the film's style coincides with the typology of light in the Dantean allegory.

The musical quotations of Bach, which inject a baroque element within an otherwise antibaroque imposition of a style derived from early Renaissance painting, suggest that the film describes the "passion"—the suffering endurance—of Accattone, his hagiographic agony unto death. Of course, Dreyer had already emphasized this *imitatio Christi* in giving his film of Joan's trial such a title. Pasolini may also have been aware of the Anselmic dimension of Bach's theological polemic in the *Passion according to St. Matthew*: that salvation comes from Christ's willing gift of His death and cannot be earned by the action of men. So Pasolini's protagonist accepts salvation in his dying words ("Mo sto bene"), but he does not earn it.

Broadly speaking there are three movements in the film: Accattone's loss of Maddalena as his source of income, his destitution and attempt to convert Stella into a substitute for Maddalena, and the finale of his passion and death attempting to support himself and her, first by manual labor, then by theft. In all three sections accidents seem to guide the logic of events: at the opening Maddalena is hit by a motorbike, and at the very end a parked motorbike gives Accattone the illusion he can escape; but in a scene structured so much like the ending of *Ladri di biciclette* it must be a scene structured so much like the ending of *Ladri di biciclette* it must be deliberate, the motorbike he steals becomes the agent of his death. He meets Stella for the first time, accidentally, while conspiring to exploit his estranged wife. More significantly, he meets her again at the very moment he is about to reap the reward of a plot against his friends to get their share of food from a church charity.

The spoken language of the *ragazzi di vita* is so embedded with fossilized Christian oaths (themselves layered on a linguistic palimpsest of invocations to Latin gods) that the theological markers in the text are easily disguised as signs of colloquial realism. So Fulvio opens the film with a note of doom: "Ecco la fine del mondo." (Behold, the end of the world.) He carries funereally a bouquet of flowers. The *ragazzi* call his work at a flower stand "martyrdom," and the very word "work" a "blasphemy." Later, after Accattone brutally presses Stella into prostitution, he remarks

in exasperation: "Madonna, fateme santo! Chè la penitenza mia già l'ho fatta! E quanta!" (Madonna, make me a saint! What a penance I've already done! and how much!)

Accattone is no allegory of Christ's mission, but it is riddled with Gospel allusions ranging from the farfetched—Accattone's meal and his dive into the Tiber wearing gold ornaments as a parody of the Temptation in the desert—to the blatant—his death in the company of two thieves. In fact, the Christological focus seems to become sharper as the film moves toward its conclusion after the repeated "falla finita" with which the protagonist announces his firm decision to keep Stella off the streets. Fulvio covers the handcart with wilted flowers as if parodying the entry into Jerusalem as Accattone banters that he is on the way to the Madonna of Divine Love (the shrine to which Fellini's Cabiria had made a pilgrimage). The night before, when Accattone had dreamed of his own death, the images literalized the parable of the shepherd: "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in some other way is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1). Barred from entering the cemetery as part of his own funeral procession, he scaled the wall to confront the grave digger. So even in his dream Accattone subverts the symbolism of salvation, rendering any orthodox interpretation of his final justification uncomfortable.¹⁵

Therefore the redemptive narratives of Rossellini's Manfredi-Episopo and Fellini's Cabiria and Augusto are less problematic than that of Pasolini's hero. Yet, Pasolini's obsession with the *via crucis* dominates all his early black-and-white films: there is the Christ-like death of Ettore in *Mamma Roma*, the film of the Crucifixion in *La ricotta* (*The Piece of Cheese*), the full-scale biblical narrative of *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*, and even the parodic trinity of Father, Son, and Bird in *Uccellacci e uccellini*. But this obsession is not a measure of his piety, but almost the reverse, that is, the ground from which he argues with the Church and with the Italian tradition, from the perspective of a self-proclaimed "heretic" or "Lutheran," not in the sense of a Protestant sectarian, but a prophetic rebel.

In the middle of *Accattone* one of the prostitutes seated with the *ragazzi* when Accattone first offers Stella to a man at another table quotes Dante: "Lasciate ogni speranza, o voi ch'entrate" (Abandon all hope you who enter here) as if hell and prostitution were identical. When *Mamma*

Roma picks up the Dantean undersong of *Accattone*, it remains in this infernal register.

A brief excursus on *Mamma Roma* will illuminate the centrality of the Dantean model for Pasolini's early cinema. The end of that film went through at least two major changes before it was shot. The treatment published in *Ali dagli occhi azzurri* lacks the recitation of Dante in Ettore's prison infirmary cell, but it has an elaborate fantasy, brought on by his fevered delirium, in which Mamma Roma magically crosses a sea and encounters an incarnation of Joy, who enacts with her a parable about a partisan and a soldier, while Ettore is being humiliated by a gang of boys.

In the published script, this complex dream, inspired probably by Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*, shrinks to a superimposed fantasy of elephants attacking and killing Mamma Roma in Guidonia where Ettore was raised, while a Sardinian prisoner recites the end of *Inferno*, canto 18. In the final film there are no dreams or delirious fantasies, but a different Dantean recitation remains: the beginning of canto 4 is quoted.

What do these changes mean? I would surmise that the contextual apiness of canto 18—at the moment of the Pilgrim's vision of panderers, seducers, and flatterers buried in feces—carried too absolute a condemnation of prostitution for a film which bestows so much sympathy on Mamma Roma, who was forced into prostitution as a teenager and whose efforts to escape and boost her son into the lower middle class are systematically frustrated throughout the film. Nevertheless, Pasolini wanted to invoke the *Inferno* within that film, rather than announce his Dantean theme with a quotation in the beginning as he had done in *Accattone*. Therefore, he substituted the more generic opening of canto 4, the first sight of hell in the *Commedia*, for the problematic specificity of 18. Yet for technical or aesthetic reasons Pasolini dropped the dream sequence from the same scene, depriving us of participation in Ettore's subjectivity and rendering his agony in prison the parallel of that earlier moment in the film when his restlessness in his mother's apartment signals his decision to steal and sell her records.

The changes in the ending of *Mamma Roma* point to three lines of convergence with *Accattone*: a moral ambivalence about their shared theme of prostitution, a pseudobiographical form that would have included an oneritic premonition of death, and a carefully chosen allusion to the *Commedia*. The dark irony of Pasolini's second, and less successful,

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film is that the meiorated world of the INA Casa (public housing apartments constructed in the fifties) and the petit bourgeois ethos of the reformed prostitute make up an even crueller hell than the slums. Mamma Roma's desperate attempts to keep Ettore from becoming a manual laborer, that is, her efforts to frustrate his natural class allegiances, ultimately lead to his death and her despair.

Brunetta identified the motorbike Mamma Roma gave Ettore as both a symbol for the yearning to escape from the confines of the subproletarian ghetto and as a displacement of her own desperation to escape prostitution.¹⁷ She makes her one political statement while riding on it behind her son: in response to his statement of dislike for the middle-class waiters with whom he works—"they think they are somebodies when they have a little of their fathers' money in their pockets"—she worries that he is becoming a Communist.

→ In Pasolini's first films, upward mobility is a descent into hell. If Accarone is a parodic saint, he owes his salvation to the very horror of his situation; for Pasolini suggests that only the most humble and despised know salvation. Yet the cinematic genre through which he operates, the spiritual biography, had emerged in the European art cinema of the 1950s as the privileged locus of bourgeois sensitivity within alienation. But by inscribing allusions to the *Commedia* in both films Pasolini claims a pedigree for his vision outside of the immediate cinematic context.

Il posto

Displaying a cinematic originality comparable to that of Pasolini, the Lombardian, Ermanno Olmi, concentrated in his first feature films on the ways in which the new conditions of industrial labor in the flowering of the economic miracle took hold of the lives of workers. His emphasis on the centrality of work experience in the sentimental education of his young male protagonists was new in the Italian cinema; it called attention to the peripheral presence of the workplace in earlier films.

Of the fictional characters I have already discussed, Visconti's Ciriaco Parondi would be closest to one of Olmi's heroes. It is perhaps significant that Visconti gives him only a marginal place in his familial chronicle, as if its melodramatic mode could not adequately represent his experience. And yet he is the only industrial worker depicted in the monumental films of the "superspettacolo dell'autore": Antonioni's Sandro puts off his work

estimating architectural costs throughout *L'avventura*; Giovanni Pontano resists the seductions of corporate work in *La notte*; Marcello and Pappazzo can hardly be called workers, so extraordinary are their jobs in *La dolce vita*. In all of the major films of the immediate postwar period work was significant by its scarcity (*Ladri di biciclette*), absence (*Miracolo a Milano*, *Umberto D.*), or failure (*La terra trema*).¹⁸ The opportunity of working was a given by the time of *Accattone*: but the *ragazzi di vita* define themselves by rejecting it, calling "work" an obscene word in the opening scene of the film.

Olmi began making films for the Edisonvoka electric company in 1953. His first feature, *Il tempo si è fermato* (*Time Stood Still*, 1959) focuses on the first job of a wide-eyed adolescent who is sent to be a watchman in an isolated mountain electrical station, where only one older man works with him. Daily work remains the preoccupation of his next two films, *Il posto* (*The Sound of Trumpets*, 1961) and *I fidanzati* (*The Fiances*, 1963). These films constitute the richest and most complex cinematic contribution to the meditation prominent in Italian intellectual life on the new conditions of labor in the large corporations at the center of the economic miracle of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The literary and intellectual context of Olmi's cinema included a theoretical discussion of the new conditions of labor in the economic miracle and a range of fictional works centering on factory production and the psychological adjustments of workers. Elio Vittorini and Italo Calvino devoted all of the fourth and some of the fifth issues (1961, 1962) of their annual journal, *Il Menabò*, to the question of "Industria e letteratura," criticizing the inadequacy of the American "slice of life" approach to the representation of the new conditions of industrial life in neocapitalist Italy. They offered the hypothesis that fiction such as that of Robbe-Grillet and the *école du regard* was a more genuine expression of the emerging situation than novels in the realistic tradition which featured workers as protagonists.

In his opening editorial Vittorini stated that "the investigation we are trying to conduct with *Menabò*, in the life of our nation 'through' literature . . . must bring us sooner or later to collect the texts which would let us see to what point the 'new things' amid which we live, directly or indirectly, . . . are accounted for in the 'newness' of the human imagination."¹⁹ In the subsequent issue Calvino wrote of the "shock" that the industrial revolution gave literature and philosophy, changing "things,

places, time," so that there are "no longer things but products, mass-produced, machines take the place of animals, the city is a dormitory annexed to the office, time is a clock, man a cog, only classes have a history. . . ." ²⁰

Il Menabò published essays by both editors as well as Franco Fortini, and novelists Ottiero Ottieri and Luigi Davi among others. In a lucid historical survey of "Temi industriali nella narrativa italiana," Marco Forti focused on the work of Davi, Ottieri, Testori (one of the sources for *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*), Giovanni Arpino, Luciano Bianciardi, and Calvino's stories, "La speculazione edilizia" and "La nuvola di smog." Calvino himself stressed Bianciardi and Arpino and added the work of Paolo Volponi to the discussion. Almost all of the fictional representations of industry discussed were written in the late fifties or the very early sixties.

The longest text collected in *Menabò* 4, Ottiero Ottieri's "Industrial Notebook," began by linking cinema and literature:

November 1954. If fiction and cinema have given us little of the internal life of the factory, there's first of all a practical reason, which then becomes a theoretical one. The world of the factory is a closed world. One doesn't enter or leave it easily. Who can describe it? Those inside can give us some documents but not their explanation: unless they come from artists who are workers or employees, which seems extremely rare. As for artists who live outside, how can they penetrate an industry? The few that work there grow silent, for reasons of time, opportunism, etc. The others don't understand anything about it. Furthermore industry is without expression; that's its characteristic. ²¹

Vittorini took exception to this in his opening editorial:

Could the experience of the factory help a writer today more than the experience of cultivating the soil (or of hunting, fishing, herding, etc.) have helped a writer yesterday or earlier? . . . Industrial truth resides in the chain of effects that the world of the factory sets in motion. And the writer, whether or not he deals with the life of the factory, will be on an industrial level only insofar as his sight and his judgment are interpenetrated by this truth and the examples (examples of appropriation, examples of deeper transformation) that it contains. ²²

By the time his notebooks of the fifties appeared in *Menabò*, Ottieri had published *Domarmunia all'assalto* (1959, *Men at the Gate*, trans. I. M. Rawson [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962]), a novel based on his experiences as a personnel psychologist for Olivetti in a factory outside of Naples. The *Menabò* inquiry was an attempt to make sense of two different, and not necessarily linked, tendencies already apparent in Italian and European literature in the initial years of the sixties: the reassertion of the avant-garde novel, now with a decided predilection for metonymy (the hyperbolic concentration on things and places as a displacement of the constitutive subjectivity of the genre), and the thematic concern with the rhythms and consequences of urban industrialization in a Europe now fully recovered from the disasters of war. The Italian rediscovery of the Frankfurt school, particularly Benjamin and Adorno, at this moment intensified the theoretical speculation of writers, such as Vittorini and Calvino, who had reached maturity in the moment of the Resistance.

Ermano Olmi, like Ottieri, was one of the rare artists who knew industry from an insider's perspective. He worked as a clerk at the Edison-volta offices in Milan (where his mother was employed, following his father's death during the war), before moving into the directorship of its Sezione Cinema (prior to the nationalization of the electrical industry at the end of 1962). Between 1952 and 1959 he made a series of about forty short industrial films. The last of them he clandestinely stretched into his first feature, *Il tempo si è fermato*.

The male protagonists of Olmi's first three feature films can be seen as versions of a single type at three sequential moments of entry into the work force. Roberto, who skis and plays in the snow in *Il tempo si è fermato*, is the youngest; his isolation with Natale in the mountainous outpost allows the filmmaker to explore the tensions between archaic traditions of paternal-filial succession and modern modes of employment. Natale's central speech mourning the loss of respect for elders locates more clearly than either of the two subsequent films Olmi's intuition of a troubling divergence of family life and work. Less childlike than Roberto, Domenico, the teenage protagonist of *Il posto*, enters his first job wholly absorbed in an unfocused erotic quest, yet without any preparation for independence from his parents; his very awkwardness solicits and requires maternal guidance from most of the women in the film. Giovanni, the protagonist of *I fidanzati*, is not only older and more mature than the earlier Olmi

heroes; he enters the film with both a job, as a welder, and a long-term erotic relationship.

The novelist Paolo Volponi, like Ottieri, worked for the personnel office of Olivetti for many years. When he ventriloquizes the factory worker of his 1962 novel *Memoriale* (*My Troubles Began*), he gives examples of the eccentric situations of his co-workers:

I know that one of the men who work with me has a crazy mother whom he has to lock up in the bedroom during the day so he can come to work. Another fellow I know gets drunk with his mother. He leaves his wife and goes with his mother to a tavern where they spend the evening drinking and hugging each other like a couple of drunks. Often they disappear for months, they rent a bedroom in some hotel, drink like crazy, and go to all the shows in town.²³

Olimi gives us a comparable picture of the eccentricities of otherwise apparently "normal" office workers in *Il posto*. Once the young protagonist, Domenico Cantoni, obtains a mail delivery position in a large company, Olmi suddenly suspends the otherwise consistent identification of the camera and editing with the perspective of the naive Domenico to give us a comic picture of the office into which he will eventually move, and even more unexpectedly the filmmaker cuts from the office to typical moments in the private lives of the clerks: there is a nearsighted man who writes a novel at night in his rented room, trying to hide the light from his landlady; another is embarrassed when a neighbor comes to the door as a woman (his wife or mistress²⁴) is cutting his hair; he quickly hides the evidence of his economy; a third refuses to respond to his landlady when she tells him someone wants to buy his uncle's magazine collection, as if he were a capitalist or a mafioso; yet another sings operatic arias in a cafeteria for old people. The only woman represented in this montage suffers from her grown-up son's thefts from her purse. In Jeanne Dillon's terms: "In all, we have a failed writer, a failed bourgeois, a failed speculator, a failed singer, and a failed mother."²⁵

Olimi seems to be at one with Volponi and Ottieri in suggesting that the anesthetizing regimen of the new technological industries is transforming the Italian working class into neurotically obsessive automata. Within the office of *Il posto* the individuality of the workers whose home life we had glimpsed is reduced to a range of habits and ticks: the woman is often

late (presumably because of troubles with her son); Carletto, the singer, wads papers and erringly tosses them at a basket; Don Luigi, the heir to the old magazines, cuts his cigarettes in half to economize, refusing the loan of one to a messenger; the top continually combs his sideburns; the writer fiddles in frustration with a broken desk lamp. Later, his unanticipated death creates the opening for Domenico. For Olmi, as for Volponi, these are the frightening consequences of finding a fixed place in such a system. This interlude defines the working place as a zone of mutual indifference and even suggests that its schoolroomlike formality subjugates and intimidates the spirits of its temporary inhabitants from fully functioning in the world outside.

Il posto depicts the experience of an adolescent from the suburban town of Meda in the period from his first examinations for a job in a large corporation—its name and even its function are withheld from the viewer to generalize and to emphasize the alienation of the corporate experience—to his securing a position as a clerk. His mother stresses the idea that entry into such a corporation insures employment for life, even if at low wages, inscribing a fatefulness in this mundane passage.

Olimi's debts to neorealism are so unambiguously acknowledged here that Millicent Marcus could write convincingly: "It is as if we were to visit the Ricci household thirteen years after the events of *Bicycle Thief* to find Antonio not only comfortably employed, but the father to two upwardly mobile sons."²⁶ Marsha Kinder lists a number of the film's "images that are found in *Umberto D.*: the cafeteria with its cheap food, the niggardly landlady who harasses the lonely bureaucrat, and the old man with a small dog riding on a streetcar."²⁷ Simultaneous with these touches from De Sica, there is throughout Olmi's early work a pervasive influence of Rossellini's attention to significant details. Although he has often acknowledged his debt to Rossellini, claiming, in fact, that seeing his postwar films made him a filmmaker, it would almost seem as though he encountered Rossellini secondhand, mediated through the films of Jacques Tati, and as though he saw in the alienated eccentricity of Tati's complex observations a latent potential for recovering a Rossellinian humanism. Therefore, instead of inventing an agent of the absurd and uncanny, as Tati does in *Huilot*, to be seen with wonder and comic incomprehension by the society around him, Olmi posits an innocent observer at the center of a society otherwise unconscious of its own absurdity. So in Domenico, Olmi gives us a witness to the oddities of Lombardian workers and pedestrians who is

not yet stamped by his own peculiar habits. Yet the one glimpse the filmmaker gives us of Domenico's adolescent abuse of his younger brother—whom he accuses of appropriating his no longer needed book strap—reinforces the assumption that he will eventually transfer his domestic aggression to the office, falling into a version of the petty patterns of the older clerks who mark their working spaces with idiosyncratic obsessions and jealously guard the insignificant signs of their seniority. In telling his brother to put the book strap back in its "place," Domenico utters the first of several senses of the film's title. In Italian "il posto" means the job, the place, the seat, and even a trumpet call. Domenico's employment entails finding a permanent place for himself, and even one of the rigidly hierarchical seats in a pattern of office desks, where his routine is punctuated by regulatory signals, from the morning alarm clock to the buzzers defining lunch and work shifts and even to the ceremonial claxon of the new year.

Even though *Il posto* outlines the passage from entry to maturity in a large corporation as a numbing accommodation to meaningless routine, it mounts a formidable resistance to its own pessimism. Its originality is largely a function of the dynamics of its contradictions: in the first place, the abbreviated story of the first job is also an even more tenuously suspended story of first love. The strongest counterforce to the bleakness of the representation of corporate life, however, is the bewildered interest of Domenico through whose perspective the details of urban street life, workplace idiosyncracies, and incipient romance become equally charged occasions of comedy, mystery, and wonder. His absorption with Magali, whom he met the day they took examinations for company positions, anesthetizes him to the immanent consequences of his job. By circumscribing the film's temporal span to the liminal period between the day of examinations and the moment Domenico takes over his first desk, the filmmaker can present the theater of routine as an excursion into an odd but unthreatening cityscape through the eyes of a fresh "suburban immigrant" for whom each moment offers a new curiosity. It is this youthful curiosity that distinguishes Olmi's vision of industrial life from the bleaker fictions of Volponi and Ottieri.

According to his collaborator and friend Tullio Kezich, who plays the psychological examiner in the film, the first cut ran twenty minutes longer, developing the romance until Domenico realized, with a shock that made him ill, that Magali also went out with other men. A final scene showed

him wandering around Milan and ultimately encountering a vision of the "dolce vita" as he happened upon a group of models posing in a dump.

Furthermore, within the corporation Domenico encounters women who take a maternal interest in him. These women complement the role of his mother who mediates his quarrel with his brother, buys his clothes for him, pushes him toward the security of the corporate job, and negotiates permission from his father to attend the New Year's Eve party. Even Magali, herself an innocent, takes a slightly patronizing or more mature posture toward him, as when she tells him that his "old fashioned" name suits him or when she advises him on the style of a trench coat. The women at the New Year's Eve party continue and even raise to a carnival pitch the maieutic pressure of these female presences throughout the film. They assist in Domenico's conflation of corporation life with the symmetrically structured life of his lower-middle-class family, while all of the men he encounters at work, like the men at the party, are alienated monads.

By eliminating the first ending and concluding the film with Domenico's promotion to take the place of a clerk who died, Olmi puts a new emphasis on the displacement of eros into labor. In fact, the long romantic prelude charges the pivotal scene of the New Year's Eve party with significance: as his hope for the arrival of Magali evaporates, he gives himself over to the spirit of the event. The frustrated date becomes his initiation rite as a corporate employee.

A powerful and abrupt transition catapults the party into the occasion of Domenico's promotion. From a hand-held telephoto shot of the young man abandoning himself to a snake dance with the accelerating tempo of a festive tarantella, capped by the blowing of an absurd paper party horn, the image suddenly shifts to a slow pan of clerks surrounding the desk of the man who secretly wrote fiction at night. A series of dissolves of his now empty room symbolizes his death, perhaps even his suicide. This is the culminating moment of the film: through montage the parallel stories of first love and first job converge. To be precise, the disappointment of the erotic idyll was sufficiently indicated by Magali's absence from the party. The bitter confirmation of her independent love life would have been redundant, and it would have undermined the power of the transition from disappointment in spite of the festive socialization to the fundamental displacement of erotic aspiration onto the illusion of corporate "success."

That progress within the corporation is indeed an illusion is the

message of the next and final scene. When the desk of the dead clerk is cleaned—and a chapter of his manuscript is thrown into a “dead” file surely never to be claimed—the desk is given to Domenico until one of the older clerks complains. Then they all scurry to move one desk closer to the front of the room, while Domenico assumes a post in the back with a flickering lamp already familiar to the viewers from the previous clerk’s ill-tempered obsession with its unreliability.

I fidanzati

Each of Olmi’s first three feature films orchestrates a similar transformation of the familiar contemporary Italian environment into an anthropological travelogue by the displacement of a young worker. The elaborate montage of *I fidanzati* responds to the fictive premise that Giovanni, a Milanese welder, can advance in his trade by working for a new plant in Sicily for eighteen months. His long-distance relationship with his fiancée Liliana constitutes one primary motive for montage, often evoked by Liliana’s letters; another would be the trigger of memory set off by his loneliness in a strange environment.

The revitalization of psychological montage was widespread internationally in the early sixties from the radical achievements of Markopoulos, Brakhage, Hlanoun, and Mekas to the banality of *The Panambroker* and *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*. The earlier successes of Kurosawa’s *Ikiru* (1952) and Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries* (1957) and the lively discussion of Resnais’s *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) in Italian film journals provided a context for Olmi’s departure from the aesthetics of the long take and complex *mise-en-scène* that had characterized until then the best Italian cinema.

I fidanzati begins in a Milanese dance hall with a scene evoking the New Year’s Eve party of *Il posto*. After delineating a state of tension between Giovanni and Liliana, who refuses to dance with him and for a while turns down another partner when he dances with a stranger, Olmi sketches the cause of their conflict through an elliptical series of flashbacks. Throughout the opening eleven minutes the music of three dances can be heard continually, although frequently with diminished volume when the very sparse dialogue of the flashbacks occurs. Only with the takeoff and landing of the airplane that brings Giovanni to Sicily does the cessation of the music signal a change of matrices. Without developing a conventional

narrative continuity, and leaving many questions suspended, the montage informs us that Liliana is upset by Giovanni’s acceptance of a job that will keep him in Sicily for eighteen months. His situation is further complicated by his irresolution about placing his alcoholic father in an old-age home while he is away.

I discern four sections or movements to the film. The first, as I have already noted, centers on the Speranza dance hall in Milan; the second describes Giovanni’s introduction to Sicily while staying at the company hotel; the third, his adjustment to Sicily during his stay in a *pensione*, slips into the fourth, his correspondence with Liliana. Throughout the opening movement the relationship of the couple remains at an impasse: the manner of their silence toward each other and the punishing way they have of dancing with other partners indicates, through what Kinder identified as the “pseudo-iterative mode,” that they have succumbed to the habit of such standoffs.

Giovanni’s introduction to Sicily is at once an invitation by his biased northern colleagues to share their attitude of superiority to the rustic traditions of the natives and at the same time a lapse into infantilism, brought about by homesickness and the exclusively male company. From the moment he is driven from the airport to the hotel, Giovanni suffers an alienation from his colleagues, who discuss the engineering schools they attended (which will ultimately spark his sympathy for the Sicilians they disdain); but initially the change of environment goads his memories. When the speeding driver, complaining about the sudden danger posed by a donkey cart entering the road, calls the Sicilian an “idiot” and an “animal,” Giovanni remembers fragments of his departure and Liliana running away from him.

Olmi establishes a similarity between the factories in Milan and Sicily by filming both locations with moving camera shots, rhythmically assembled in the manner of the major Soviet films from the silent period which heroicized the dynamics of heavy industry. He is by no means single-mindedly critical of the national efforts of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno to ameliorate the economy of the South. In fact, a beautiful montage of sparks cascading from the welders’ work at night constitutes labor’s equivalent to the fireworks at the festival of Acireale, the carnival that climaxes the second movement and marks the turning point of the film.²⁸ Yet he acknowledges that the bigotry of the engineers and managers is shared in varying degrees of intensity by the northern foremen and skilled

workers, and that it is bolstered by the sometimes comic maladjustments of the natives, such as the young woman whom a secretary has to keep from bringing her entire family with her on her first day of work. When an accident occurs, a co-worker tells Giovanni with sympathy that the Sicilians refuse to wear eye goggles, and hyperbolically, that at first they didn't come to work on rainy days. On the bus to the hotel, more northerners who have been longer in the South complain of the escalating costs and talk of the Sicilians' preference for strenuous agricultural work to the more profitable factory labor. Giovanni went to Sicily with the economic attitudes and aspirations of his fellow northern workers; in the flashbacks he repeats to Liliانا the clichés of his class: that "this is the chance of a lifetime," and that "others will be eager to snatch the opportunity if he doesn't take it." However, the deeper pattern of his decision corresponds to the southern experience in the political literature of the late Fascist and postwar period: Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia* (1937), Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (1945), and Pavese's *Il carcere* (*The Prison*, 1949), the latter two narratives of politically imposed exile describe the protagonists' geographical dislocations as spiritual encounters with enduring Italian values.

More directly than Ottieri's *Domatrunnina all'assalto*, which preceded *I fidanzati* in transforming the political experience of the South into one of industrial alienation, Olmi's film recaptures from those founding narratives of anti-Fascist and post-Fascist fiction the spirit of personal regeneration in the face of the poverty and starkness of the South. Although the narrator of *Domatrunnina*, a psychologist in charge of factory personnel, leaves his Campagna workplace with nostalgia, he described only a growing intensification of the atmosphere of misunderstanding, bordering on violence, caused by the fantasies of the local poor that the newly located company could employ virtually the whole town. However, Ottieri's well-meaning psychologist demonstrates none of the humorous inanity of the company psychologist who reduced Domenico to giggles in *Il posto*.

The carnival of Acireale marks the turning point of *I fidanzati*. With a group of his co-workers, led by an older executive, whose looks and behavior invokes the great comic actor Totò, Giovanni encounters in the dense, mostly masked crowd first an old man whose intoxicated collapse reminds him of his father and then a seductive young woman who spontaneously sympathizes with him because he is so far from home: "poverino

[poor little thing!]," she says, "si lontano [so far away]," offering him a kiss through her veil in compensation.

The reminder of his father occasions a brief montage that clarifies, in two or three elliptical strokes characteristic of the whole film, the situation in which Giovanni had left him. Olmi cuts from the falling drunkard in the Acireale to Giovanni's father rising, alcoholically dazed, on his bed. In the next shot Giovanni hands over to a middle-aged woman (we never know more about her) documents which he said he signed so that she could put the old man in a home if necessary. She tells him his father has got drunk again and there is no hope for him, but a man, presumably her husband, interjects that if they put him in the home, they will not allow him wine. His commiserating language—"the only consolation for these poor old men [*questi poveri vecchi*]" points forward to the encounter at the carnival that immediately follows the flashback. Later, through one of Liliانا's letters he will learn that the father has taken to watching television instead of drinking at night, which, from Olmi's perspective, might not be a wholly optimistic transference of consolations.

The spirit of the carnival persists that night, in a debased form, at the hotel. Arriving ahead of his companions, Giovanni recalls a New Year's Eve fête at the Speranza, with the habitués in party hats, including the woman with whom he danced and the swell who danced with Liliانا. But the association of the two celebrations recalls the image of Liliانا sitting alone as he dances with the other woman, from the opening scene of the film. Later, the links will be clarified when another flashback reveals him swimming with and kissing the other woman, followed by a scene with Liliانا who has been told of the betrayal. Olmi's subtle art refrains from conjoining the innocent, passing flirtation at the carnival directly with the allusion to the affair. The acknowledgment of Giovanni's sexual presence, and the very possibility of an erotic relationship in the South—itsself a development held in common by the novels of Vittorini, Pavese, and Levi—forces at this stage a reflection on the stagnation of his relationship with Liliانا.²⁹ With exquisite timing Olmi holds off the images of the affair until Giovanni has received his first letter from Liliانا.

On the night of the carnival his companions, loud and drunk, arrive at the hotel in a donkey cart much like the one insulted during the ride from the airport. They proceed to play clumsy practical jokes on Giovanni, rattling his blinds, and attempting to get into his locked door. But when

he tries to revenge his disturbance, he suffers the embarrassment of a scolding from an awakened neighbor who catches him in the corridor with a douche filled with water. Thus what I take to be the second movement of the film ends with Giovanni's infantilization. Having separated from Liliانا and his father, he tentatively establishes moral bonds with the alienated community of northern managers and workers. This regression is a necessary stage preliminary to the sentimental reeducation to be founded on his unmediated encounter with Sicily in the third movement and his new vision of Liliانا in the fourth.

The Tautouesque humor of the film is quickened in what I take to be the third part, which begins as Giovanni moves from the hotel to a *pensione*. A number of vignettes are structured as gags. When Giovanni wanders into a church and stays to listen to an old priest solemnly sermonizing schoolchildren, a stray dog upsets the lesson by barking in church. As a topos of north Italian estrangement from the South, this scene has its origin in *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, even though Olmi has claimed it reproduces an event he witnessed in Sicily. There is a running gag on the tendency of the *pensione's* toilet door to get stuck, and another turning around the obsession of another roomer with his radio. The accumulation of whimsical observations lends a picturesque quality to other, less comic details, such as a young Sicilian rolling a truck tire through the streets, or a car with a loudspeaker offering the finder of a lost wallet the five thousand lire in it as a reward for returning the lost papers it also contained. It is in this section that the visual poem of welding sparks aggrandizes Giovanni's nightlong labor.

His landlady gives him the first letter from Liliانا when he returns in the morning to try unsuccessfully to get some sleep. Instead of giving us the text of the letter, as occurs throughout the fourth part, Giovanni's memories of swimming with and kissing the woman from the Speranza follow in his silent reading of it. The memory montage includes a scene with Liliانا who has been told of the affair. More saddened than angry, she asks him if he still wants to marry her. That question remains suspended over the rest of the third movement as we see Giovanni wander in the Sicilian landscape and enter the church where the dog interrupts the priest. The sensitive placement of the memory of infidelity and the questioning of the engagement frames Giovanni's explorations as a renunciation of the erotic possibilities suggested in the carnival encounter, so that

the act of writing to Liliانا is simultaneously a repetition of their courtship and a positive answer to her question.

In the final movement a duet of voices holds together the most elaborate interlacing of images in the film. The texts of six letters, alternately recited by Giovanni (in voice-over) and Liliانا (speaking to the camera), flow almost uninterrupted, as the images freely alternate from writer to reader and often become illustrations of the text. In Liliانا's last letter the pattern becomes even more complex; her evocation of the history of their relationship variants the blending of new and already familiar images of their lives in Milan. Throughout the correspondence, dancing stands as a metonymy for their sexual fidelity: Giovanni tells her that he never goes dancing in Sicily and asks her if she still frequents the Speranza. Liliانا answers that she avoids it because of the malicious innuendoes of the *habitués*.

Both the rhythm of the montage and the textual acknowledgment that the separation has rebuilt and strengthened their love climax with the film's most conventional moment, a kiss (presumably an illustration of the past) underscored by a musical flourish. Olmi is too sensitive to end his film so banally. Following the kiss, he shows Giovanni telephoning Liliانا for the first time. Their awkward conversation—we hear only Giovanni—has none of the fluidity and sincerity of the letters. Liliانا needs assurance that the call does not represent a crisis or an emergency; Giovanni says little more than that he is calling before taking the bus to work because the telephone rates are half-price on Sundays, but in the space of the very short conversation he talks himself into taking the day off.

During the phone call thunder can be heard in the background. The final images of the film describe a torrential storm in the Sicilian landscape. Olmi explained the origin of this scene to Charles Samuels in terms that recall the magic of *Miracolo a Milano*: since he needed an unseasonal storm for the conclusion, he prayed to his dead grandmother to intercede for him:

I had this crazy dream: I was shooting my last scene in a downpour so terrific that it was actually painful; even the trees were bending under it. I went on filming, while my grandmother looked on, happy and satisfied. Imagine how I felt when I awoke from that vivid dream to see an utterly clear sky. Nevertheless, I told everyone to get ready for work because it would rain

that day. They looked at me as if I were crazy. We went to the salt flats and worked all day, without one drop. But by afternoon a storm came. . . . With machinery you can make rain, but not a storm like that.³⁰

Within the film the sudden storm functions as a natural confirmation of Giovanni's renewed spirit. Walking in the rain, instead of going to work, he unintentionally adopts the Sicilian spirit previously mocked by the northerner who had told him at first the Sicilians did not come to the factory when it rained. In the same interview Olmi glossed the moment: "Now he no longer hides from her behind the excuse of money. He makes his most beautiful declaration of love; he says, 'Today I won't go to work.'"³¹

From the opening shots during the titles of musicians and cleaners entering the Speranza dance hall, Olmi's predilection for the carnivalesque representation of odd and distinctive types is evident. The two middle-aged women who initiate the first number by dancing with each other are odd but not grotesque (as in Fellini's version of the carnivalesque). Olmi told Samuels: "I wanted to communicate my love of the ordinary things in life. I began by taking pictures of objects and people sheerly for the love of them. Shooting these pictures was a way of coming closer to the world of work that I shared with my colleagues."³²

His loving fascination with faces and gestures and with picturesque details had to be highly developed in *I fidanzati* to sustain the burden of associative editing and elliptical narrative. Aside from the two protagonists the camera does not dwell on anyone for long, but many of the minor figures are vividly delineated: in Milan the facial expressions of the self-assured habitué who dances with Liliانا and the resigned pathos of Giovanni's father are particularly striking. In the latter case, the single candid speech of a sympathetic uniformed official at an old-age home where Giovanni considers leaving his father, intercut with images of melancholy old men, verbally and visually defines the danger immanent in his passivity; so that the sole subsequent image of the father watching a neighbor's television from his apartment balcony, inserted to illustrate a letter from Liliانا, encapsulates his successful adjustment to his son's absence.

A great part of Olmi's peculiar and impressive achievement in *Il posto* and *I fidanzati* was the originality with which he contextualized otherwise conventional stories of amorous longing and maturing love within the dynamics of the industrial workplace. The clarity and precision with which

he records the particulars of corporate labor contribute to the impression he convincingly renders that new rhythms and altered expectations have changed the character of daily life in Italy. These films maintain an openness to the possibility that this historical turn may be engendering a crisis in the arena of personal affections; but that openness also includes the suggestion that the traditional Catholic virtues may still be able to define a meaningful life.

Salvatore Giuliano

On 1 May 1947 the Sicilian bandit, Salvatore Giuliano, and his band opened fire on a political demonstration of fifteen hundred people at Portella della Ginestra, killing eleven and wounding sixty-five. For three years Giuliano successfully eluded a massive manhunt on the island. Six months after the shooting, Francesco Rosi, a Neapolitan film student, accompanied Luchino Visconti to Sicily as an assistant director on *La terra tremita*. They lived on the other side of the island in Catania and shot in Acitrezza, while the manhunt was in its initial, intense phase. Giuliano was killed in June 1950 under circumstances never adequately explained. The romance of Giuliano and the Byzantine intrigues surrounding his career, his death, and its cover-up fascinated the Italian political imagination, with criminal suspects directed even into De Gasperi's cabinet, nearly as much as the assassination of John Kennedy has fed American anxieties, in large part because of the suspicious deaths of principal witnesses in both cases.

Rosi's 1961 film, *Salvatore Giuliano*, isolating the main points in the life and death of Giuliano and the trial of his gang members, is the prototype of innumerable documentary dramas which reenacted scenes to direct attention to unresolved problems and contradictions. Yet none have equaled its intensity and authoritative power of imagery, including Rosi's own *Il caso Mattei* (*The Mattei Affair*, 1972), where he returned to the genre he invented to examine the implications of the suspicious death, in a private airplane, of the maverick petroleum czar.

The unanswered questions surrounding the Giuliano case become in Rosi's hands the foundations for an elaborate and ambiguous narrative structure that recalls Antonioni's *L'avventura* in both the mystery at the core of its subject and in the picture it gives us of contemporary Sicilian reality. Umberto Eco, in his contribution to *Membò* 5, "Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà" (trans. "Form as Social Commitment" in

The Open Work), cites the then recent *L'ecclisse* to show how "Antonioni lets his forms express the alienation he wants to communicate to his public."³³ In a lengthy footnote on recent cinema, eliminated from the reprinting of the essay in book form and therefore not included in the English translation, he contrasts the formal structure of *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* to that of *Salvatore Giuliano*:

But [the resolution of all plot contradictions into a universal order] would not account for the substantial ambiguity of a film, otherwise meritorious, such as *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*: a very real problem, vividly accented in its contradictions (considering the entrance of southerners into northern industrial culture; the adaptation of their ethical schemes to those of an urban, industrial culture . . .) turned out to be practically exorcised by an "operatic" treatment that relocated the theme in the domain of nineteenth-century narrative. Beginning, crises and problems, cathartic finale: the audience left pacified and happy. But did the director want them to be happy about anything? I don't think so. Therefore the narrative structure took the author by the hand and forced him to make, in the guise of denunciation, a film for the psychological pacification of consumers. Now take the opposite example: *Salvatore Giuliano* by Rosi. Apparently in the old realistic school, but right away the viewer becomes aware of something disturbing in this sequence of "photographs" of reality and in the continual use of the *flashback*: there comes a point when he no longer can distinguish in which phase of the story he finds himself and he gets the impression that in order to understand the film perfectly he would have to have known all the facts from the beginning better than he knows them. But the truth is that in the story of Giuliano, in the very nature of his rapport with the mafia and with the police, or of the police with the carabinieri, or of Giuliano with Pisciotta, and so on, no one knows the facts exactly. In short, the particular narrative technique devolves from the actual "content" of the film and constitutes its most important statement: an unclear story is told to the viewer by an author who is the victim of the same obscurity and who does not want to cheat him by clarifying facts that are not clear, but wants to leave all doubts intact. So the director seems to let his film be organized by the situation rather than organizing the situation through his film.

Although the film has roots in what Eco called "the old realistic school" apparently to avoid the vagueness and potential misconstruction

of "neorealism," Gianni Di Venanzo photographed it in a stylized, almost mannered, version of Aldo's depth compositions for *La terra trema*, with objects or persons in the near foreground to accentuate the depth. Rosi invests this strategy with a dramatic flair: a landscape in depth has only the barrel of a bandit's gun low in the frame to indicate the frontal plane; a lawyer in the right foreground, blocked by part of a wall, watches unseen the interaction between three figures in an open doorway in the middle distance, with the bright landscape through the open door contrasting the dark interior; a long row of carabinieri stretches from the camera to the horizon of a street in Montelepre. There is hardly a shot in the film that does not set up an extreme range between close and deep. Even in meticulously reproducing the courtroom of Viterbo, where Pisciotta, Giuliano's lieutenant, and the surviving band were tried, the bars of the enclosure (*gabbione*) for the accused provide convenient foreground markers.

In Rosi's first film, *La sfida* (*The Defiance*, 1958), Di Venanzo had shot an argument between neighbors situated on different levels of the interlocking roofs and staircases of densely compacted apartment buildings in Naples, making such dynamic use of foreground and depth figures that it looked like a mannered extrapolation from the carefully orchestrated scene outside the Valastros' house in *La terra trema* which I discussed in the third chapter. In *Salvatore Giuliano* Rosi and Di Venanzo extended that tour de force throughout the entire film.

The film evidences further stylization in its dynamics and editing patterns, although these, unlike the consistent foreground and background markers, shift as the film progresses so that they work through a morphology of organizational strategies, different in each of the eleven temporal zones as the film weaves backward and forward in telling the story of Giuliano's army. For instance, the opening episode in which the police photograph and take measurements of Giuliano's body the morning after his murder, and then let the press take photographs, is a static montage, with only one moving camera shot, slowly arching from the head and arm of the corpse to his feet and back. The stasis of the montage lays emphasis on the image of the dead body, familiar to many Italians from newspaper photographs in 1950; and it is also a foil to the following episode, set in Palermo in 1945, in which the camera moves or pans in almost every shot. But when the action suddenly returns to the morning after the shooting, the now fluid camera follows the reporters as they probe contradictions in the official report, retrospectively associated with the static montage.

The fourth section of *Salvatore Giuliano*, describing Giuliano's frustration of a massive military operation to capture him in 1946, begins and spectacularly concludes with baroque complex moving camera shots of the arrival of the forces in Montelepre and their roundup of all the men in the town, while between these two poles can be seen a midday battle in the mountains and an embassy of mafiosi who establish an allegiance with Giuliano. The starkly lit scenes on the mountain are framed by the dense chiaroscuro of the interior shots in Montelepre.

The shift to the cemetery, where Giuliano's mother will formally identify her son's body, brings us back to the temporal progression of the first and the third zones, but now sound plays a distinctive role in counterpoint to the shifts between static and moving shots. The intense keening of the mother and another grieving woman actually continues in a new register the previous section's chorus of wails mounted by the women of Montelepre, who had swarmed into the town square where the men were assembled to be trucked to prison. When the mourners actually see Giuliano's body, laid out on a marble slab, initially cooled by two massive blocks of ice, the removal of which reveals the body posed like Mantegna's and Annibale Caracci's dead Christs, the women fall silent; the camera follows in closeup the mother's caresses and kisses over the exposed flesh of the corpse until she answers the local official that it is indeed her son. Then her subdued words rise into an aria of keening.

The sixth division of the film, representing Giuliano's recruitment of new troops in 1947, introduces shot-counter-shot to such an extent that the viewer becomes retrospectively aware of how rarely it was used up until now. And the seventh, comprising the capture and mostly the 1950 trial of Gaspare Pisciotta and the other survivors of Giuliano's band, formalizes shot-counter-shot into a rhythmically insistent matrix of long shots, in depth—either from behind Pisciotta in the enclosure of the accused, or from beside and behind the interrogating judge, or from the back of the courtroom. Within the sixth part, the massacre at Portella della Ginestra is the swiftest montage in the film, even containing fleeting allusions to the Odessa Steps scene from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. The formalism of the long shots of the trial make occasional closeups of witnesses and the culminating slow dolly up to Pisciotta more resonant.

For the rest of the film the trial will remain the center of gravity, as the morning after Giuliano's death had been for the first half of the film. Thus, the eighth segment moves from the testimony of a carabinieri colonel to

the events leading up to and including Pisciotta's murder of Giuliano, and the subsequent planting of the corpse in the courtyard where the police, in collusion, had claimed to have ambushed him. But when the scene returns to the courtroom for the ninth part, the shot-counter-shot is frontal and closer to the speakers, without the stylized framing from behind a head. Only during the reading of the verdict—life imprisonment for Pisciotta and those active at Portella della Ginestra, acquittal for several others—does the camera freely move isolating each of the accused and then following Pisciotta as he complains that he alone saved a carabinieri colonel from execution and that he should therefore be released.

The penultimate episode illustrates his death from poisoning in prison in a series of shots characterized by their low angle. The enigmatic finale is made up of merely two shots: a long shot of a Sicilian town with the date 1960 superimposed (with the sound of gunfire everyone scatters except one fallen man); and a medium shot of the dead body of the mafia liaison to Pisciotta, sprawled out like Giuliano had been in the courtyard. Throughout the film the separation of stylistic components is not so systemic that it undermines the quasi-documentary tone; gestures from one zone will appear with considerably less frequency or importance in another, modulating and perhaps even disguising the uniqueness of the film's internal design.

Similarly, a variety of strategies mark the transitions between these eleven zones of time in *Salvatore Giuliano*. A title card distinctly divides the opening from the part it labels "Palermo 1945." Furthermore, a voice-over narrator identifies the group on a balcony above a turbulent piazza as leaders of the Movement for an Independent Sicily (MIS). But this double imposition of narrative guidance only makes the unmarked return to the police and reporters on the morning of Giuliano's death all the more sudden and disorienting, since it follows an image of a carabinieri jeep under attack in 1945, without any cinematic punctuation to soften the transition.

Each subsequent return to the past again uses a voice-over to identify the place and time. Accompanying the voice during the second flashback (Montelepre in 1946), Rosi slowly and impressively probes the landscape with a flexible zoom lens for a minute and a half. Again, the return to the "present" occurs without punctuation, now to exploit the auditory echo of the keening women. He uses a fadeout to distinguish between blocks only once: after the third flashback, which includes the Portella della Ginestra massacre, he fades before introducing a photograph of Giuliano,

which soon turns out to be part of his tomb, as the camera reveals the ministrations of his mother. The voice-over hesitates, prolonging the uncertainty of the time, before declaring that it is 1950 and thus setting up the story of the capture of Pisciotta. The capture itself culminates in a montage gesture unique to the film: the image of Pisciotta emerging from a trapdoor in an attic floor when the police have surrounded him cuts immediately to one of him rising in the defendant's enclosure to address the Viterbo court.

A more complex procedure introduces the flashback of the plot to kill Giuliano which divides the long courtroom scenes. Images of two newspapers announce the imminent testimony of General Luca (the head of the special carabinieri unit created to capture bandits) and his rival Chief Inspector Verdiani of the Palermo police. Two very long shots of Luca's testimony precede an unpunctuated shift to what turns out to be the corridor of a police station, but which could be taken for a part of the same Viterbo court building since the offscreen voice of the President of the Court can be heard over the image, talking of the difficulty of determining the role of the Mafia in the carabinieri attack. The sequences that follow are so elliptical, with unmarked leaps in time describing the trajectory of the conspiracy, that it is difficult to follow the narrative without outside information on the case. Rosi had earlier used this mode of ellipsis to distance us from the intensity of the quasi-military operations of the first flashback: in a series of three attacks on carabinieri—one in the night in a small town, another on an isolated barracks in the hills, and the third against a jeep on a mountain road—without voice-over to help us understand what to expect or even what is going on, and without cinematic punctuation to separate the attacks, he synopsisized the successes of Giuliano's wing of the EVIS (Army of Volunteers for the Independence of Sicily). In both instances the elliptical and puzzling narration protects the film from lapsing into a conventional crime or suspense drama.

The concluding sequences are structured to suggest conspiracies that remain undefined. Pisciotta's final courtroom speech ends with his prediction that there will have to be another trial to determine how Giuliano died and that he will then tell what he has so far held back. With this tantalizing hint the scene cuts directly to the Ucciardone prison in Palermo. From a low angle the camera tracks through a barred gate following a guard. We assume that Terranova, one of those convicted for the Portella della Ginestra killings, poisoned Pisciotta, because we see him pocketing

the bottle of medicine in Pisciotta's cabinet when the guards call him to help carry the convulsive convict to the infirmary, but there is no indication of what prompted him to do so. This is the only invention of Rosi's I can detect in an otherwise scrupulously researched scenario, although the powerful cemetery imagery of Giuliano's mother kissing his corpse may be a displacement of the reports that she demanded to be taken to the courtyard where his body was found and kissed the bloodstains on the ground.³⁴

The finale is even more mysterious. A direct cut from the last shot in the prison—precisely reversing the opening gesture as Terranova, taking the visual position of the initial guard, shouts to the cells above him that "Gaspere is dead!"—brings us a Sicilian town as the date 1960 in white letters dramatically flares out from the distance, as if the underweb of the conspiracies is about to be revealed. But we only hear gunfire and, in the next and final shot of the film, see a body lying prone which may be that of the unnamed Mafia liaison between Luca and Giuliano's gang, although the shot deliberately hedges a clear identification. Many Italian viewers in 1962 would remember that Benedetto Minasola, who indeed was Luca's Mafia connection, was assassinated in 1960 in San Giuseppe Jato.

A quest for accuracy of detail, which Rosi may have learned from working with Visconti, counterbalances the film's stylistic peculiarities. Rosi shot in the very houses and courtyards where Giuliano's drama occurred.³⁵ Many compositions re-create news photographs of the events. The actor, Frank Wolff, looks very much like the handsome Pisciotta. Many of the cast were taken from the Sicilian towns where Rosi filmed. Even fleeting background images reflect Rosi's visual research: the wall poster Giuliano made showing a chain that held Sicily to Italy severed while another chain totes Sicily to the United States, or the naive mural of a lion, symbolizing "the king of Montelepre," over his bed in his mother's house—his major concession to the fictive texture of cinema was his decision to use standard Italian, with a few Sicilian lines for inessential greetings and cries; in this too he learned from Visconti, but negatively.

He enlarged upon the *coralità* that Spitzer identified in Verga's *I Malavoglia* and which Visconti incorporated in *La terra trema* by dispersing choral effects among the reporters in the first and third parts, the women of Montelepre in the fourth, and the codefendants of Pisciotta in the trial scenes. Like Antonioni who depicted a mass reaction to Claudia's uncorted stroll in *Noro*, Rosi represents the otherness of Sicily through group reactions, while Olmi prefers the isolate, uncanny detail.

In contrast to this there is an unrealistic, yet nevertheless moving moment early in the film, when an elderly separatist, in a baroque elaborate shot, incites some of Giuliano's band to fight for the freedom of Sicily, and then, as the camera follows him closely, pauses and, speaking to himself, apostrophizes the very landscape: "Sicily awake! Too long is this shameful and this sad dream in which you have lost even your honor. Now the trumpets loudly sound and you can no longer sleep, because dreaming would be death." The camera, in this long, complex shot, finally pans away from him to the mountainous landscape as he melancholically alters his rhetoric: "Roses, roses, white roses of Sicily, turn red with our red blood. But the sons, and the sons of sons will live free in a free land and they will lift their brows to the sky and smile on the future." Although Rosi shot the film with direct sound, an unusual practice in Italy, he called a few of the actors to Rome to dub some speeches, including an aged separatist especially engaged for this minor role because of the emotion he expressed every time he recited this traditional separatist hymn before the landscape. But even in the studio he could not repeat it without sobbing. Rosi gets as much of the strange power of this moment from the quaking voice as from the hymn. Then he immediately punctures its sincere emotionalism with the three violent scenes of Giuliano's campaign against the carabinieri.

Salvatore Giuliano has none of the heroic epic elegance of *La terra tremò*. Visconti retarded the pace of his film to imbue it with the rhythms of Vergan fatalism, against which he slowly inscribes his own version of Gramscian meliorism. Rosi's film is antithetic. He astutely avoided censorship by quoting court documents whenever the corruption of the state was in question.³⁶ There is no mention of Scelba, who was the interior minister during the search for Giuliano and who, as prime minister in 1954 (when Pisciotra was poisoned), might have had the most to lose from a scandal. Nevertheless, the film implicitly indicts Scelba and all of his allies in the right wing of the DC, at the very moment when they were making their last stand against the opening to the Left. In fact, Scelba himself would soon turn down another ministerial portfolio in Fanfani's coalition with the moderate Left. Rosi's film suggests, as no other Italian film had done, that the long hegemony of the DC was predicated upon and continually reinforced by terrorist manipulation and collaboration with organized crime.