

Beyond Camps: The Mythologem of the Orphan-Child in the Italian Neorealist Experience of
the 1940s

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ABSTRACT

LORENZO STEFANO BORGOTALLO: *Beyond Camps: The Mythologem of the Orphan-Child in the Italian Neorealist Experience of the 1940s*
(Under the direction of Federico Luisetti)

My dissertation proposes to define Italian Neorealism, in the context of the cinematic and literary aftermath of WWII, as a specific and new kind of “experience”: a new way of experiencing the world, a life-experiment through artistic means, in which the recurrent mythologem of the Orphan-child appears as a powerful symbol of crisis and renewal, liminality and subversion, capable of putting into question every camp-thinking attitude as such. My thesis is that, through the prism of the Orphan-child, Italian Neorealism represents a renewed interest in the Other as “a possible world”--to use Gilles Deleuze’s insightful definition; namely, a willingness to accept an open-ended, inclusive, elaboration of the real, as opposed to the rigidly encamped and clichés-ridden way of looking at the world, typical of the Fascist frame-of-mind and of the Bourgeois attitude towards the Other.

As far as theory is concerned, my study connects cinema and literary history and criticism with myth criticism (Brunel, Kerényi, Jesi) and post-structuralist theory (Deleuze, Agamben, Derrida, Foucault, Gilroy). The novelty of such an approach is not only in my privileging the mythological overtones of Italian Neorealism, but also and foremost in acknowledging the deep interconnections that exist between Neorealist films and novels of the 1940s and the more general cultural milieu of the time.

Chapter one illustrates the cultural, political and ethical break--or “awakening”--of Italian Neorealism from the myths and clichés perpetuated by Fascism and Bourgeois camp-thinking. Chapter two and three focus on the linguistic and/or perceptive subversiveness of the mythologem of the Orphan-child, as it constantly resurfaces, respectively, in three key-films and three key-novels of the time: De Sica’s *The Children Are Watching Us* (1943), Rossellini’s *Open City* (1945), De Sica’s *Miracle in Milan* (1951), Moravia’s *Agostino* (1944), Calvino’s *The Path to The Spiders’ Nests* (1947) and Pavese’s *The House on the Hill* (1949). In the conclusion I propose to define the six works previously analyzed as examples of an “anti-Bildung” approach: an expression of the open-ended interpretation of the real advocated by the Neorealist cultural milieu and a courageous attempt--still valuable today--to finally move “beyond camps”.

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INTRODUCTION

Myth Criticism, Post-Structuralism and Ethics

My dissertation proposes to define Italian Neorealism, in the context of the cinematic and literary aftermath of World War II, as a specific and new kind of “experience”: a new way of experiencing the world, a life-experiment through artistic means, in which the recurrent mythologem of the Orphan-child appears as a powerful symbol of crisis and renewal, of liminality and subversion, capable of putting into question every camp-thinking attitude as such, while opening up new possibilities of looking at the world.¹ In other words, the epistemologically subversive Orphan-child figure may function as an open-ended mythological “signifier” in Neorealist films and novels of the 1940s, capable of overthrowing what Michel Foucault defined as the Fascist frame-of-mind (xiii) and what Umberto Eco has called “Eternal Fascism”: an ever-present mental attitude, rather than a specific historical phenomenon reassuringly circumscribed to the European political context of the 1920-40s.²

¹ The highly debated term “neorealism” that started circulating in the Italian cultural milieu of the 1940s was first used by Marxist critic Giuseppe Alicata in 1941 in his review to Cesare Pavese’s novel *Paesi tuoi*. However, its very first appearance actually dates back to the 1920s, as a rendering of the German *Neue Sachlichkeit*, literally “Neo-objectivism,” considered as a way to recoil from the subjectivism of German expressionism. For a detailed analysis of the term’s history and subsequent uses see Lino Micciché’s *Il neorealismo cinematografico italiano* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1999).

² In his preface to Deleuze and Guattari’s 1972 *Anti-Oedipus*, Michel Foucault highlights the fact that their strategic adversary is “[n]ot only the historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini [...], but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior [...]. How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior?” (xiii). Analogously, in one of his *Five Moral Pieces*, published in Italy in 1997, Umberto Eco notes: “[...] ritengo sia possibile indicare una lista di caratteristiche tipiche di quello che vorrei chiamare l’Ur-Fascismo’, o ‘il fascismo eterno’. Tali caratteristiche non possono venire irrigimentate in un sistema; molte si contraddicono reciprocamente, e sono tipiche di altre forme di dispotismo o di fanatismo. Ma è sufficiente che una di loro sia

In my opinion, the mythical dimension of many “realistic” cinematic and literary works of the 1940s bears witness to a more generalized interest towards myth that seems to have deeply characterized Italian culture as a whole after the closure of Fascism and the destruction brought about by WWII. My thesis is that, through the prism of the Orphan-child mythologem, the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s represents a renewed interest in the Other as “a possible world”--to use Gilles Deleuze’s insightful definition (*Michel* 306); namely, a willingness to accept an open-ended, inclusive, elaboration of the real, as opposed to the rigidly encamped and clichés-ridden way of looking at the world, typical of the Fascist frame-of-mind as such and also--*mutatis mutandis*--of the Bourgeois attitude towards the Other.

If we follow, in fact, Italian mythologist Furio Jesi and interpret the Bourgeois “spirit” as “la tendenza ad organizzare la vita entro un microcosmo, ove tutti i rapporti sociali rivelino la presenza di mura ben salde: quelle della casa, dell’azienda familiare, della città” (*Germania* 106; “the tendency to organize life within a microcosm, in which all social relations reveal the presence of very solid walls: those of the home, the family-run company, the city”), then the Orphan-child’s mythologem will appear as a powerfully subversive presence, capable of disrupting eventually all three of the above mentioned “camps,” while allowing for a more open-ended and inclusive interpretation of the real, full of Deleuzian *puissance*.³

presente per far coagulare una nebulosa fascista” (97; “[...] I think it is possible to outline a list of features that are typical of what I would like to call Ur-Fascism, or Eternal Fascism. These features cannot be organized into a system; many of them contradict each other, and are also typical of other kinds of despotism or fanaticism. But it is enough that one of them be present to allow fascism to coagulate around it” 70).

³ The term *puissance*, as it appears in the works by Gilles Deleuze, is the opposite of *puouvoir*, that is, *puissance* is immanent power, power to act rather than power to dominate another; the ability to affect

To my knowledge, no scholarly work has yet underlined the deep influence that the mythologem of the Orphan-child has exerted on Italian Neorealism as a whole. In her seminal work *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism: Fables of Estrangement* (1990), for instance, Lucia Re illustrates how Italo Calvino's first novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* (*Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, 1947), deeply challenges the poetics of objectivity and realism traditionally associated with Italian Neorealism by estranging our perception of the world through the gaze of the child-protagonist. Analogously, almost a decade earlier, Gregory Lucente's *The Narrative of Realism and Myth* (1981) acutely disputes the traditional distinction between mythic and realistic modes of discourse. However, Re and Lucente never properly highlight the fundamental role played by the Orphan-child archetype in changing the way we look at the world, nor do they stress the important mythological overtones of this primordial and symbolic figure.

In analyzing the function of the Orphan-child's mythologem within the Italian cinematic and literary production of the 1940s, I will borrow the notion of myth from Hungarian mythologist Károly Kerényi and, more specifically, from the works on mythology of his Italian disciple Furio Jesi. As we will see, according to Kerényi and Jesi, myth is always "mito dell'uomo" (*Demone* 111; "myth of Man"), both in the subjective and objective sense of the genitive; that is, myth always deals with man and is also produced by man. Such a definition closely echoes, in my opinion, the renewed humanism to be found at the center of the Neorealist experience of the 1940s, from Cesare Pavese's often-quoted 1945 article *Return to Man* (*Ritorno all'Uomo*), to Alberto Moravia's 1946 essay *Man as an End*

and to be affected, while forming assemblages that fully respect the heterogeneity of their components.

(*L'uomo come fine*), to Luchino Visconti's 1943 influential appeal for an *Anthropomorphic cinema* (*Cinema antropomorfo*).

On the whole, my dissertation concentrates on the epistemological break with Fascist and Bourgeois “closed” interpretations of the real represented by Italian Neorealism, illustrating this discontinuity through various perspectives: from the broader cultural and socio-historical context to the literary and cinematic occurrences of the mythologem of the Orphan-child, and then back again to the larger picture of the Neorealist cultural milieu. As far as theory is concerned, my study aims at connecting cinema and literary history and criticism with myth criticism (Brunel, Kerényi, Jesi) and post-structuralist theory (Deleuze, Agamben, Derrida, Foucault, Gilroy). The novelty of such an approach is not only in my privileging the mythological overtones of Italian Neorealism, but also and foremost in my focusing on *both* films and novels of the 1940s, insofar as--to my knowledge--the scholarly works that have dealt in the past with the Italian Neorealist experience tend to concentrate their analyses *either* on its cinematic side *or* on its literary side, without ever fully acknowledging the deep interconnections that exist between the two phenomena and the more general cultural milieu of the time, in a sort of all-encompassing Deleuzian “rhizome.” But before providing a brief summary of the structure of my dissertation and give a general outline of the single chapters, I would like to focus first on two key concepts referenced in the title of this study--“mythologem” and “camp”--so as to offer a preliminary definition of terms that will function throughout my dissertation as two of my main analytic tools.

In the opening section of his seminal book *Mythocritique* (1992), dedicated to the theory and practice of contemporary myth criticism, French critic Pierre Brunel comments a quotation from Pessoa that I find enlightening: “O mytho é o nada que é tudo” (5; “Myth is

that nothing which is everything”). The oxymoron through which the Portuguese poet evokes the destiny of Ulysses, who willfully referred to himself as *Outis* “Noman,” thus becoming the sign of an absence, as well as the longing of a presence, is cited by Brunel in order to highlight the double nature of myth itself: “Il est une illusion évanescence, mais aussi une réalité plus vraie que le vrai” (63; “It’s an evanescent illusion, but also a reality more truthful than the truth”). Convinced of the eminently symbolic nature of myths, the author of the *Dictionnaire des mythes littéraires* (1988, 1994, 2000) formulates as follows the central hypothesis of myth criticism: each mythological reference within a given text--written or audio-visual--must be considered not as a simple decorative accessory, but as a profound “signifier.” Better still, textual analysis will be structured precisely on the basis of such references, insofar as the mythical element, even if indirect or latent, possesses in each and every case a powerful “pouvoir d’irradiation” (82; “puissance to irradiate”).

Drawing on Brunel’s methodological approach, my analysis focuses on the specific mythological signifier of the Orphan-child, as it reappears over and over again in Italian Neorealist cinema and literature of the 1940s, thus acquiring the traits of a true “mythologem.” According to Karoly Kerényi, in fact, a mythologem is a mythological material that constantly resurfaces in culture and is constantly remodeled (*Essays* 2-3). Unlike the Jungian concept of archetype, more commonly adopted in myth criticism, the analytic tool devised by Kerényi opens up, in my view, the possibility of privileging not so much the “origin” (*arche*) of a given myth, but the fact that this latter can be constantly remodeled as a “discursive practice” (*logos*), capable of acquiring in its various “becomings”--to use Gilles Deleuze’s expression--either genuine or technicized connotations. In the case at hand, the “abandoning” of a child who later on causes profound

transformations is, in and of itself, one of the most powerful mythologems of all: in the stories of Moses, Oedipus, Paris, Romolus--just to cite a few--as well as in the three films and three novels analyzed in my dissertation, the Orphan-child actually functions, as we will see, as a powerful double-sided symbol of crisis and renewal, capable of subverting the encamped status quo.

As for the other key concept referenced in the title of my dissertation, I borrow the notion of “camp” from cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy and his seminal work *Between Camps* (2000), which presents itself as an ethically charged “exercise in strategic universalism” (96), an attempt to imagine political culture beyond the glamour of ethnos, while focusing on what used to be called the problem of species being. Conversely, the camp-mentality approach to the world

[...] might be defined by the veneration of homogeneity, purity, and unanimity that it fosters. Inside the nation’s fortifications, culture is required to assume an artificial texture and an impossibly even consistency. Culture as process is arrested. Petrified and sterile, it is impoverished by the national obligation not to change but to recycle the past continually in an essentially unmodified mythic form. Tradition is reduced to simple repetition. (84)

Thus, the risk of every camp-mentality as such is that of reducing identity to the “uncomplicated, militarized, fraternal versions of pure sameness pioneered by fascism and Nazism in the 1930s” (103). The Nazi use of the swastika symbol, for instance, appears in *Between Camps* as a technicized way of bringing order to a chaotic and threatening world by making everyone who wore it somehow of equal value, thus producing a compelling illusion of sameness both from within and without the Nazi “camp,” while attempting to unify the inevitable diversity and complexity of the real into an ideal and unnatural uniformity. After all, as Gilroy justly reminds us, in the Europe of the 1920-30s, radio, cinema and newsreels

created forms of solidarity and national consciousness that propelled the idea of belonging far beyond anything that had been achieved in the nineteenth century by print and national languages. Hence, my interpretation of the Nation-State follows Gilroy's reading of it as an encamped *locus*, in which "specific versions of solidarity, belonging, kinship, and identity have been devised, practiced, and policed" (85).

But if we expand Gilroy's notion of camp to include also Giorgio Agamben's interpretation of the concentration camp as *the camp par excellence* (*Homo Sacer*), then the idea of moving beyond camps implied in the title of my dissertation may indeed acquire, as it were, the sense of an ethically charged appeal, on Italian Neorealism's part, to break away, not only from every camp-mentality as such, but also and foremost from the possibility of fostering the return of other, all too literal, "camps."

Four are the sections in which my dissertation is articulated and each one corresponds to a progressive magnifying glass. Starting from an open-ended redefinition of Italian Neorealism's mythical approach to reality and the role played within its context by the powerful and double-sided mythologem of the Orphan-child, I will focus on the ethical function that characterizes some of the most relevant Orphan-child's occurrences within the Neorealist cinematic and literary production of the 1940s, before going back to the larger cultural milieu of the Italian Neorealist experience in order to point out the common traits between its various cultural and artistic outcomes, as well as the social and political elements that eventually hindered Neorealism's courageous attempt to move "beyond camps".

Obviously, this work does not and cannot aim at being exhaustive in its representation of the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s. My intention, nevertheless, is to focus almost exclusively on six specific examples--three film and three novels--that are particularly

relevant to the thesis and the arguments that this dissertation wants to address and engage with. As it often happens, or should happen, it will be up to the reader to judge the usefulness of the approach here presented and to decide whether it might be fruitfully extended to other cultural and artistic outcomes of what I have defined as the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s and the relevant role played in it by the powerfully subversive mythologem of the Orphan-child.

As far as the actual structure of the dissertation is concerned, chapter one offers a specific definition of Neorealism as “experience”, presenting the disrupted socio-historical context brought about by WWII as the precondition for a renewal of literary and cinematic forms grounded in a renewal of experience as such, while illustrating the cultural, political and ethical break--or “awakening”--of Italian Neorealism from the myths and clichés perpetuated by Fascism. Chapter two and chapter three focus on the linguistic and/or perceptive subversiveness of the mythologem of the Orphan-child, as it constantly resurfaces, respectively, in three key films and three key novels of the time. The films I will focus on in chapter two are: Vittorio De Sica’s *The Children Are Watching Us* (*I bambini ci guardano*, 1943), Roberto Rossellini’s *Open City* (*Roma città aperta*, 1945), and De Sica’s *Miracle in Milan* (*Miracolo a Milano*, 1951). The novels analyzed in chapter three are: Alberto Moravia’s *Agostino* (*Agostino*, 1944), Italo Calvino’s *The Path to The Spiders’ Nests* (*Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, 1947), and Cesare Pavese’s *The House on the Hill* (*La casa in collina*, 1949). In the conclusion I propose to define the films and novels previously analyzed as examples of an “*anti-Bildung*” approach, pointing to the open-ended interpretation of the real advocated by the Neorealist cultural milieu as a whole. I will then attempt to address the

problematic question of the so-called “failure” of Italian Neorealism, by addressing it as a possible missed opportunity for socio-political renewal, still valuable today.

To further elaborate on the nature of my project, in the first chapter of my dissertation I propose to define Italian Neorealism as an “experience,” rather than a movement, a school, or a wave, as many critics have been tempted to do in the past. In my view, the etymological root of the term “experience,” which derives from the Latin verb *experiri*, opens up the possibility of conceiving Italian Neorealism both as a radically new way of “experiencing” the world, as well as a radically new “life-experiment.” Moreover, if we follow Giorgio Agamben and interpret Western modernity as a project of “destruction of experience,” a progressive flight “outside of Man” (*Infancy and History* 7), Italian Neorealism might then be defined as an attempt to reconstruct human experience after the traumatic events of WWII. Hence, the mythological dimension of Italian Neorealism will appear as an attempt to awake into an open-ended community, after the state of sleepiness of totalitarianism.

The second and third chapters of my dissertation present the mythologem of the Orphan-child, obsessively recurrent in Italian afterwar-culture, as a possible antidote to the technicized myths and clichés perpetuated by Fascist and Bourgeois milieus. If the Fascist youth association of the “Figli della Lupa” (“The Sons of the She-Wolf”), created by Mussolini in 1933, represents a dangerous, repressive, technicization of the myth of Romulus and Remus aimed at reproducing over and over again the same closed, tyrannical, reality, the Neorealist deployment of the Orphan-child allows, on the contrary, a subversive and open-ended elaboration of the real. Methodologically speaking, my analysis of these six key works in the Neorealist cinematic and literary production of the 1940s will attempt to retrace and highlight the linguistic and/or perceptive “sites of subversion” associated with the

mythologem of the Orphan-Child, that is to say, the textual and audio-visual instances in which the Orphan-child's perspective on the surrounding world seems capable of confronting the viewer/reader with an estranged image of the real, thus embodying the Deleuzian ideal of "being foreign in one's own language" (*Negotiations* 41), while opening up reality to new possibilities.

Finally, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "geophilosophy," the conclusion presents the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s as the result of a specific geo-historical moment, an instance of profound "deterritorialization," in which people found themselves literally "orphanized": de-linked from their home, their birthplace, their fatherland, their heritage. In this sense, the disrupted socio-economic landscape of Italian cities in the 1940s gave birth to a specific mental space, opening up a new horizon of experience while attempting to de-colonize the mind from the Fascist cultural ideology by truly acknowledging the Other as "a possible world" (Deleuze, *Michel* 306) .

Hence, my intent will be to present the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s as a missed opportunity to finally move "beyond camps": a chance of social and political renewal whose profound subversiveness was hindered by many cultural and institutional factors. If we interpret Italian Neorealism's re-linking of a mythical past with a possible future-to-come--of the "anachronistic" with the "hyperactual" to use Derrida's expression (*Echographies* 10)--as a courageous attempt to create the conditions for a new experiencing of the world, we may conclude that its cry for change remained--as stated by Giuseppe De Santis--guiltily unheard in the sociopolitical context of the newborn Italian Republic: a democracy whose public education system continued to be largely based on Giovanni Gentile's reform of 1924 and whose official cultural policies were shaped more and more by

the ideological camp-thinking requirements of the Cold War. After all, as acutely noted by Paul Gilroy,

Deliberately adopting a position between camps [...] is not a sign of indecision or equivocation. It is a timely choice. It can [...] be a positive orientation against the patterns of authority, government, and conflict that characterize modernity's geometry of power. It can promote a rich theoretical understanding of culture as a mutable and traveling phenomenon. Of course, occupying a space between camps means also that there is the danger of encountering hostility from both sides, of being caught in the pincers of camp-thinking. Responding to this perilous predicament involves rethinking the practice of politics that is always debased where the nation-state operates under camp rules. (84-85)

CHAPTER 1
The ‘Wake’ of Italian Neorealism:
Time-images and the Genuine Myth of the Orphan-Child

How are we to conceive the cultural aftermath of Fascism and WWII? What can there be after destruction? And, more specifically, how are we to (re)trace the “wake” of such traumatic events in the Italian cultural landscape of the 1940s? These are some of the core issues that I want to address in this first chapter by initially deconstructing the concept of “wake,” considered here precisely as the “aftermath of destruction”, both in the objective and subjective sense of the genitive, as well as in the three major meanings of the word “wake,” discussed by Samuel Weber in *After Deconstruction* (1992).

Drawing on Károly Kerényi’s axiom that myth always has an un-fulfilled tendency to present itself as *agalma*, image, I will establish a parallelism between Kerényi’s definition of “technicized myth” vs. “genuine myth” (the latter being an infinite “un-closed” elaboration of the real, as opposed to the constantly “closed” elaboration of the real represented by technics) and Gilles Deleuze’s conception of “movement-image” vs. “time-image”--with specific reference to the ethical and political implications of such categories. My thesis is that, if we follow Giorgio Agamben and interpret Western modernity as a project of “destruction of experience,” a progressive flight “outside of Man” (*Infancy and History*, 7), Italian Neorealism might then be defined as an attempt to reconstruct human experience, after the dehumanizing technicizations of Fascism and the traumatic events of WWII, through the powerful mythologem of the Orphan-child, capable per se of putting into question every

camp-thinking attitude as such, while allowing for new ways of experiencing--and experimenting with--reality.

In an essay significantly titled *After Deconstruction*, Samuel Weber has justly pointed out that the word “wake”--at least as it appears in the most semantically rich title of all of James Joyce’s works: *Finnegans Wake* (1939)--has three major meanings. It refers, in the first place, to the typical Catholic funeral ritual, through which family and friends of the deceased mourn together in the presence of the corpse, for one or more successive nights. In the second instance, it implies the somewhat disquieting idea of an “awakening”: traditionally, in fact, the deceased can return in the form of the Latin *larva*, the Greek *pháσμα*, the Indian *pitr*, etc. to join the festivities, just like in the Irish ballad after which Joyce’s novel is named.⁴ Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the word “wake” defines both the trace of a passage (in space) and the consequence of a presence (in time), as the classic image of a passing ship aptly suggests.

What interests me here is the strong, albeit hidden, mythical dimension that these three definitions actually have in common. The “mourning together,” implied by the wake conceived as ritual, for instance, is an experience of trans-individual connectedness, analogous to the profound sense of community that Károlyi Kerényi identifies as being, perhaps, the most important characteristic of mythology as such.⁵ On the basis of his acute

⁴ Thus the importance, according to Weber, of “watching out for” the corpse between the time of death and that of burial: “[...] ostensibly to protect the dead body from harm but perhaps also, as has often been surmised (by Freud, among others, in *Totem and Taboo*), to make certain that the deceased precisely does *not* come back, ‘wake’ and return” (134).

⁵ We might note here that, in commenting on the concept of “collective individuation” (and “self-affection”), elaborated by French philosopher Gilbert Simondon in *L’Individuation psychique et collective* (1989), Mark Hansen highlights precisely the trans-individual connectedness that derives from a profound “common experience,” such as the one depicted by Bill Viola’s slow-motion digital video *Observance* (2002), in which eighteen emotionally wrought figures take turns observing some

assumption that myth is always “mito dell’uomo” ‘myth of man’ (*Briccone 2*), both in the subjective and objective sense of the genitive--that is to say, myth always deals *with* man and is also produced *by* man--Kerényi proceeds to argue that, in ancient societies, mythology used to enlighten the life of the entire community by establishing and maintaining powerful collective bonds, between its different members, between Man and Nature, between Humans and Gods: “What one *does* by means of mythology, when one allows the ‘telling of myths’ to function in the involuntary service of a human community, [...] is far from being the idle invention of explanations. It is something else. The German language has the right expression for it: *begründen*” (*Essays 6*).⁶ In other words, myth does not answer the question “why?”, but “whence?” It does not indicate causes (*aitia*), but it constantly refers to beginnings, or first principles (*archai*):

For the earliest Greek philosophers, the *archai* were, for instance, water, fire or what they called *apeiron*, the “Boundless”. No mere “causes”, therefore, but rather primary substances or primary states that never age, can never be surpassed and produce everything always. It is the same with the happenings in mythology. They form the ground or foundation of the world, since everything rests on them. They are the *archai* to which everything individual and particular goes back and out of which it is made, while they remain

common off-screen object, that we, as spectators, are immediately compelled to identify as the corpse of a dead person. What matters, here, exactly like in Kerényi’s definition of mythology, is *not* the “object” of mourning itself, but precisely the resonance across “subjects” that mourning together, as a ritual, seems to arise. “[When] directed towards a common experience, [the process of self-affection] yields a transindividuation, a positive reverberation with the prevital force of others, that deploys the preindividual toward a different production than individual individuation. The transindividual, for Simondon, is not composed of a set of individuals, but designates a second individuation, a wholly different use of the force of preindividual reality; in it, what remains unresolved for the individual [finds a] positive, spiritual investment, one that arises from a profound resonance across individuals” (626).

⁶ As all Heidegger’s translators well know, there is no English equivalent that can actually convey the various shades of meaning associated with the term *begründen*. The root of the German word is *Grund*, which means both concrete “ground” and abstract “reason”. It is generally translated by such expressions as to “found,” “ground,” “establish,” “substantiate.”

ageless, inexhaustible, invincible in timeless primordiality, in a past that proves imperishable because of its repeated births (*Essays* 7)

What is interesting to note, here, is that the idea of (re)birth closely echoes that of awakening (from death), which, as we have seen, is the second meaning implied in the word “wake” and it is not by chance that Austrian philosopher Martin Buber used to highlight, yet again, the profound sense of trans-individual connectedness that characterizes the “state of wakefulness”, as it appears in an ancient fragment of Heraclitus: “those who are awake have [as opposed to those who sleep] one and the same cosmos in common, that is to say, a common world to which they all participate at once” (qt. in Jesi *Letteratura* 36). In commenting this same excerpt, Furio Jesi--possibly the finest amongst all of Kerényi’s disciples--has underscored even more the collective dimension of such wakefulness, as opposed to the individual subjectivity of the “state of sleepiness”, by establishing an illuminating parallelism between the two states in question and Jung’s trans-individual *archai*: “Se, infatti, l’inconscio è di per sé collettivo--secondo l’insegnamento di C. G. Jung--, esso si mantiene in equilibrio nella psiche umana quando entra in rapporto con un altro elemento collettivo quale la coscienza in ‘stato di veglia’; ma è destinato a prevalere se nella psiche la coscienza è in ‘stato di sonno,’ e cioè viziata dal soggettivismo” (*Letteratura* 37; “If the unconscious is itself collective--as C. J. Jung has taught us--it remains in equilibrium inside the human psyche as long as it encounters another collective element such as a conscience in the ‘state of wakefulness’; but it inevitably prevails as soon as the conscience in the psyche enters a ‘state of sleepiness,’ that is to say, is ruined by subjectivism”). Thus, the first two meanings of the word “wake,” conceived as ritual, and as state of being, both seem to imply an idea of trans-individual connectedness that we might describe as an awakening in/to a community, an attempt to overcome--both in Jesi and in Buber, as well as

in Kerényi--the inevitable closedness of subjectivity, by opening up to a collectivity that is constantly reborn through the prism of myth.

Having identified the possible mythical implications of the first two meanings of the word “wake”, we can now go back to our initial set of questions and ask ourselves, once again: How are we to interpret the temporal-spatial wake--finally conceived as “aftermath”--left by Fascism and WWII in the Italian cultural landscape of the 1940s? In the last chapter of his *Cinema I* book, Gilles Deleuze presents Italian Neorealism precisely as the direct consequence--or wake--of the disrupted political, social, economical and physical situation brought by WWII. In so doing, he identifies five characteristics that are specific to the new cinematographic image introduced by directors such as Visconti, Rossellini and De Sica: the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of the clichés, the condemnation of the plot. In order to grasp the new situation, it was necessary for these directors to create, according to Deleuze: “a new type of tale [*récit*] capable of including the elliptical and the unorganized, as if the cinema had to begin again from zero, questioning afresh all the accepted facts of the American tradition. The Italians were therefore able to have an intuitive consciousness of the new image in the course of being born” (*Cinema I* 211-212)⁷.

⁷ Of course, one can legitimately ask: why Italy? Why did Neorealism first occur in Italy, and not, let's say, in France or Germany? As Deleuze aptly points out, on the one hand, Italy still had--as opposed to Germany--a cinematographic institution that had managed to escape Fascism rather successfully, on the other hand, it could refer to a strong resistance and a vital popular life underlying oppression--as opposed to the French Resistance, too much compromised with the dominant party of De Gaulle. In his essay *On the Movement-Image*, Deleuze writes: “There are of course historical and geographical factors [...] running through cinema, bringing it into relation with other arts, subjecting it to influences and allowing it to exert them. [...] I think all images combine the same elements, the same signs, differently. But not just any combination's possible at just any moment: a particular element can only be developed given certain conditions, without which it will remain atrophied, or secondary” (*Negotiations* 49).

Now, the new image to which Deleuze is referring here represents the advent of the so-called “time-image” (analyzed in *Cinema II*) as opposed to the “movement-image” (examined in *Cinema I*), that was typical of prewar movies. But, before focusing our attention on the distinction between these two types of images and, subsequently, on the fundamental contribution of Italian Neorealism, we need first to go back to the definition of montage, contained in the third chapter of *Cinema I*, while keeping in mind that, what Deleuze writes in reference to cinema, may well apply also to the workings of literature, as my analyses in Chapter three will engage in demonstrating. After all, as noted by Alberto Moravia in *Man as an End*: “Il mondo umano è unitario e ogni volta che un’idea ottiene la preminenza sulle altre, essa tende irresistibilmente ad esorbitare dal campo che le è proprio in altri coi quali non ha nulla in comune” (195; “The world of mankind is unitary, and every time one idea becomes pre-eminent over others it tends irresistibly to go beyond its proper field and enter other with which it has nothing in common”; 14).

Traditionally speaking, montage has often been viewed as cinema’s creative tool par excellence--at least since the times of Griffith and Eisenstein--and, in this perspective, Deleuze’s two cinema books might well be considered not so much as a taxonomy of the image, in which single images would have to be considered in themselves, but rather as a taxonomy of the *gap*, conceived in the terms of the Bergsonian theory of perception, that is, a taxonomy of the possible connections, either rational or irrational, *between* images.

If read along these lines, the three varieties of movement-image identified in *Cinema I*--the “perception-image”, the “affection image” and the “action-image”--represent an extremely acute and detailed analysis/interpretation of different forms of montage, or different modes of connecting images, while privileging, for instance, sometimes

“affections” (e.g. Dryer), sometimes “perceptions” (e.g. Vertov), sometimes “actions” (e.g. Griffith). On the other hand, the crisis/break of the movement-image brought by Italian Neorealism and the subsequent advent of the time-image, analyzed in *Cinema II* pass through new ways of connecting together actual and virtual images, by means of links that are sometimes irrational, sometimes incommensurable, sometimes indiscernible.⁸ The only generality of montage, according to Deleuze, “is that it puts the cinematographic image into a relationship with the whole; that is, with time conceived as the Open [...]. One the one hand, it is the variable present; on the other the immensity of future and past” (*Cinema I* 55).⁹

What is striking about this passage is that, if we were to substitute the word “mythologem” to the expression “cinematographic image,” we would end up with something that closely echoes Kerényi’s definition of mythology: that in which all of its single happenings, or mythologems, are in direct relationship with the *apeiron*, the Boundless, “in a timeless primordiality, a past that proves imperishable because of its repeated births” (*Essays* 7). Hazardous as it may seem, the connection between the art of cinema (at least, in the Deleuzeian acceptance of the term) and the art of mythology (as presented by Kerényi) is closer than one may think.

⁸ Needless to say, the Deleuzian time-image does not imply the total *absence* of movement. What changes is the subordination between the two: “Time no longer derives from the combination of movement-images (from *montage*), it’s the other way round, movement now follows from time. *Montage* doesn’t necessarily vanish, but it plays a different role, becomes what Lapoujade calls ‘*montrage*’” (*Negotiations* 52).

⁹ In the first chapter of the *Cinema I*, while discussing extensively the bergsonian concepts of movement and time, Deleuze describes the Open in the following terms: “If the living being is a whole and, therefore, comparable to the whole of the universe, this is not because it is a microcosm as closed to the whole is assumed to be, but, on the contrary, because it is open upon a world, and the world, the universe, is itself Open. [...] If one had to define the whole, it would be defined by Relation. [...] Relations do not belong to objects, but to the whole, on condition that this is not confused with a closed set of objects. By movement in space, the objects of a set change their respective positions. But, through relations, the whole is transformed or changes qualitatively. We can say of duration itself or of time, that it is the whole of relations” (10).

In the first place, we must note here that, according to Kerényi, every mythologem can be actually conceived as an image. Mythological happenings, in fact, always present themselves also as *agalma*, word-images, in so far as “myth is an elaboration directed both towards a word and an image [...], the emergence of something original [...], in the form of images, mythologems, primordial ceremonies” (*Dal mito* 167). Secondly, according to Plato’s *Republic*, there is a specific type of material that determines the art of mythology: an ancient body of immemorial elements handed down in tales already well-known, but always amenable to further reshaping. Hence, it is not by chance that, while commenting on this idea of the “materiality” of myths, Kerényi establishes an illuminating parallelism not with cinema, but with another form of art. One that is very ancient and that significantly has to do with connecting together discrete elements: Music.

Mythology is the movement of this material [handed down in tales]: it is something solid and yet mobile, substantial and yet not static, capable of transformation. The comparison with music lies nearest to hand. [...] The musical work or art shows us the artist as a shaper and at the same time the world of sound as shaped. [...] In mythology the shaping is pictorial. A torrent of mythological *images* streams out. [...] Various developments of the same ground-theme are possible side by side or in succession, just like the variations on a musical theme (*Essays* 3).

In this perspective, music, mythology and cinema, as well as literature and art in general, can all be conceived as the movement (“solid and yet mobile, substantial and yet not static, capable of transformation”) of discrete elements (musical notes, images, colors, words, etc.). But if this is true, the urgent question to ask, then, becomes that of the direction of such movement, that is: *who* imposes it and towards *what* aim, or, as Godard would say in reference to images: what is the source and what is the addressee? Kerényi, on his part, acutely highlights the fact that myth, in order to be considered a “genuine epiphany”--and not,

as we will see, a “technicized cliché”--has to present itself first of all as an *open* image, an *un-closed* elaboration of the real. Conversely, whenever a myth appears closed on itself, it is simply a “dead myth” (*Dal mito* 156).¹⁰

Now, according to Deleuze, the intrinsic limit of the movement-image (typical of pre WWII cinema, but still very common nowadays in Hollywood) is precisely its closed-ness, the fact that it can give only an *indirect* image of time, in so far as it is governed by a strict sensory-motor schema, a link of cause-effect, that tends to close the image on itself and reinforce it as a pure cliché. But what is a cliché? In Deleuzian terms:

[...] a cliché is a sensory-motor image of the thing. As Bergson says, we do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what it is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands. We therefore normally perceive only clichés (*Cinema 2* 20)

Nevertheless, if the sensory-motor schema jams or breaks, that is, if the single image is cut off from its habitual motor development, through the use, for instance, of irrational or less probable links, a different type of image can emerge: a pure optical-sound image, a *direct* time-image, finally capable of breaking through the clichés, while making new cerebral circuits possible. This, according to Deleuze, is the great merit of Italian Neorealism: that of having put into question the movement-image, by allowing a perpetual *exchange* between

¹⁰ In his fundamental article *Dal mito genuino al mito tecnicizzato*, Kerényi offers the following definition of the word “technique”: “Se usiamo nelle lingue moderne l’aggettivo greco sostantivato *techniké*--in tedesco *Technik*, in italiano ‘tecnica’, in francese e in inglese *technique*--è come se parlassimo di una *techniké techne*, di una *techne* della *techne* della elaborazione, cioè del compimento della elaborazione stessa. Tecnica è *techne* sulla via dell’autonomia, dell’essere-per-sé” (*Dal mito* 157; “In our modern languages, by using the substantivized Greek adjective *techniké*-- *Technik* in German, *tecnica* in Italian, *technique* in French and English--it’s as if we were speaking of a *technikè techne*, a *techne* of *techne* of elaboration, that is, the accomplishment of elaboration per se. Technique is *techne* in the process of becoming autonomous, of being-for-itself”).

actual images and virtual images, in which the virtual becomes actual and vice-versa, through the so-called “crystal-image.”¹¹ At the same time, as Deleuze aptly suggests, in Italian Neorealism “[the character] has gained in an ability to see what he has lost in action or reaction: he SEES so that the viewer’s problem becomes ‘What is there to see in the image?’ (and not now ‘What are we going to see in the next image?’). [It’s] no longer a sensory-motor situation, but a purely optical and sound situation, where the seer [*voyant*] has replaced the agent [*actant*]” (*Cinema 2* 272). This is why Deleuze describes Italian Neorealism as being a “Visionary cinema” (*Negotiations* 51).

Surrounded by empty or disconnected any-space-whatevers, immersed in environments with which only chance relations can still exist, faced with intolerable situations that can no longer extend into actions or reactions, the characters--and directors--of Italian Neorealism resort to mental visions or thought-images that have almost something of hallucinatory, like in the examples of Rossellini’s *Stromboli* and *Europe ’51* analyzed in *Cinema II*. This is undoubtedly true: the everyday reality of postwar Italy appears oftentimes fruitfully estranged, as Lucia Re has amply demonstrated in *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism*.

And yet, there is a specific aspect to the visionary nature of Italian Neorealism that Deleuze apparently fails to take into account or highlight properly in his two cinema books: the fact that what we see in Italian Neorealist films, especially in the ones produced in the 1940s, is very often seen through or filtered by the eyes of a very particular figure: the Orphan-child. Italian Neorealism of the 1940s is both a visionary cinema and a cinema of

¹¹ In *Doubts About the Imaginary*, Deleuze defines the imaginary not as the unreal, but as the indiscernibility of real and unreal. “The imaginary is the crystal-image. [...] What we see in the crystal is falsity, or rather, the power of falsity. The power of falsity is time itself, not because time has changing contents but because the form of time as becoming brings into question any formal model of truth” (*Negotiations* 66).

Orphan children. Of course, this can be viewed as the simple reflex of a specific historical contingency: postwar Italy was full of orphans, exactly like the rest of Europe. But what is interesting to note here is, once again, the strong mythical dimension and overtones that the Orphan-child figure acquires, as it appears in the various artistic elaborations of Italian Neorealist directors and writers of the 1940s.

Notably, films like De Sica's *Children Are Watching Us* (1943), *Schoeshine* (1946) and *Miracle in Milan* (1951), as well as Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (1947) are entirely structured around children protagonists that either are or become orphans. However, the figure of the Orphan-child plays a significant role also in other Neorealist film works of the time. Rossellini's *Rome open city* (1945), for instance, ends with the famous scene in which a group of children, among which we recognize the orphaned Marcello, witness Don Pietro's execution, before walking back towards the city of Rome, whereas the Naples sequence of *Paisan* (1946) is actually entirely based on the encounter between the black American soldier Joe and a little orphaned street urchin named Pasquale.¹²

Moreover, it is important to note that Infancy as such and the figure of the Orphan-child recurrently appear not only in Italian Neorealist cinema, but also in many Italian Neorealist literary works of the time, such as the novels published in the 1940s by Italo Calvino, Cesare Pavese, and Alberto Moravia. In Italo Calvino's first novel, for instance, *The*

¹² To a certain extent, even a film like Luchino Visconti's *Obsession (Osessione)* (1942) reveals a subtle affinity with the above-mentioned works. Towards the end of the movie, in fact, Visconti introduces a very significant and powerful scene that was totally absent in Cain's novel and that film critics have generally overlooked: a little girl--that we have never encountered before, possibly an Orphan-child--spies together with us on a heated argument between the two protagonists through the bedroom's keyhole. Minutes later we see Gino kneeling at her feet and asking: "Dimmi, sono cattivo?" ("Tell me, am I bad?") Heartened by the "approval" of the little girl, Gino sets off with Giovanna towards his new life, even though, as we know, his dreams will be shattered shortly after by the automobile accident, in which both Giovanna and the child she is expecting will be killed. The girl's presence was fruitfully pointed out to me by Prof. Dino Cervigni during a graduate level class on Italian Neorealism I attended at UNC Chapel Hill in Spring 2007.

Path to the Spiders' Nests (1947), the Partisan struggle in Northern Italy and its inevitable wake of ferocious deaths and powerful dreams are portrayed precisely from the point of view of Pin: an orphaned ten-year-old.

In commenting on the lack of serious academic studies--particularly in the English-speaking world--on the Neorealist Calvino, as opposed to the Calvino master of the fantastic and the metafictional, Lucia Re justly writes:

Some of the misunderstandings that surround Calvino's early work are caused by misunderstandings about Italian Neorealism itself--particularly Neorealist fiction--as a strictly documentary practice of representation that seeks only to denote the real. Neorealist works of art are, paradoxically, often dismissed as 'failures' on the basis of the fact that they fail to fulfill their own documentary intent as a kind of 'reconstituted reportage', as if that were the sole basis of Neorealist aesthetics (3-4).

On the contrary, *Neo*-realism is more about *new* ways of looking at the world, than about realism per se, it is more of a mental and epistemological attitude, than an actual style or practice. Personally, as anticipated in my introduction, I prefer to conceive Italian Neorealism as an "experience", rather than a movement, a school, or a wave, as many critics have been tempted to do in the past. Once again, the etymological root of the term "experience," which derives from the Latin verb *experiri*, opens up the possibility of conceiving Italian Neorealism both as a radically new way of "experiencing" the world, as well as a radically new "life-experiment" through artistic means, in which the recurrent mythologem of the Orphan-child appears as a powerful symbol of liminality and subversion, capable of putting into question the "closedness" of the cultural landscape erected by Fascism, while fostering new possibilities of looking at the world.

Now, to go back to our initial set of questions, we can ask ourselves, once again: how are we to conceive the cultural aftermath of Fascism and WWII? What can there be after

destruction? And, more specifically, how are we to interpret the recurrent figure of the Orphan-child in the wake of WWII? Traditionally speaking, such figure, or “mythologem,” has been viewed as a powerful symbol of both crisis and renewal. According to Furio Jesi, for instance:

Nelle grandi svolte della storia della cultura, e soprattutto negli istanti in cui la crisi del sentimento religioso si fa sintomo e annuncio del finire d'un ciclo, affiora dalle profondità della psiche l'immagine del fanciullo primordiale, dell'orfano. Ad essa sembra che l'animo umano affidi ciecamente le sue speranze, ed essa è sempre arbitra di metamorfosi. (*Letteratura* 13; “In the great turning points of the history of culture, especially when the crisis of the religious sentiment becomes symptom and presage of the end of a cycle, the image of the primordial child, the orphan, surfaces from the depths of the psyche. An image to which the human mind blindly commits its own hopes and that always appears, in itself, arbiter of metamorphosis”).

Károli Kerényi, on his part, has dedicated many memorable pages to the analysis of the figure in question, especially at the time of his seminal work *Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, written in collaboration with Carl Gustav Jung, and first published in 1941. According to Kerényi, the Orphan-child is not simply a mythological symbol amongst many others, but *the* mythologem par excellence:

It is not groundless generalization to say that mythology tells of the origins [but] the mythological ‘*begründen*’ has its paradox, for the man who retires into himself at the same time lays himself open. Or, to put it the other way round, the fact that archaic man is open to the world drives him back on his own foundations [...]. In the image of the Primordial Child the world tells of its own childhood, and of everything that sunrise and the birth of a child mean for, and say about, the world. The childhood and orphan’s fate of the child gods have not evolved from the matter of human life, but from the matter of cosmic life (*Essays* 7, 9, 45).

Thanks to its quintessentially liminal position, which suspends it on the border between myth and history, nature and culture, childhood and manhood, the mythologem of the Orphan-child can always reveal “the triumph of the elemental nature of the wonder-child” (36), capable of fighting and overthrowing all sorts of annihilating forces, as well as every camp-thinking attitude as such, to the extent that many of the technicized and falsely serene microcosms erected by the Fascist and/or Bourgeois frame-of-mind in relation to the concepts of the family, the city, and the nation, can be fruitfully estranged and possibly even overcome if only we allow this powerful mythologem to function in the service of an open-ended elaboration of the real, as my next two chapters will engage in demonstrating.

And yet, albeit the great powerfulness with which both Jesi and Kerényi seem to entrust the mythologem of the Orphan-child, we must acknowledge that only rarely has this figure been allowed to disclose all of its *puissance* in our societies. Perhaps, it is not by chance that several languages tend to refer to the childhood world only in the negative form: “in-fant,” he who does *not* speak; “in-nocent,” he who does *not* harm; “im-mature,” he who is *not* ripe, thus emphasizing what a child lacks, rather than what he or she has to offer. In other words, instead of acknowledging and cherishing the potentialities of renewal embedded in the children’s gaze, language and frame-of-mind, we prefer to dismiss their take on the world as nonsense, flawed from the outset because of their supposed *inexperience*. It’s as if the “instability of the signifier” (*Infancy* 91), that Giorgio Agamben significantly identifies both with the child *and* with the *larva* (that is, the non-dead that awakens), is actually too disquieting and/or challenging for us to fully accept it.¹³

¹³ According to Agamben, the “openness” of the child, conceived as an unstable signifier, makes him or her all the more threatening for the rest of the community. But, at the same time, “no society [...] can do without its unstable signifiers and, although they represent an element of perturbation and

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the *Orphan-child*, who, as we have seen, can be conceived as a powerful symbol of crisis and renewal, the bearer of an unsettling and potentially subversive “liminality” and a quintessential “otherness,” is also the one who can perhaps most readily realize the ethically-charged Deleuzian ideal of “being foreign in one’s own language” (*Negotiations* 41), by questioning, with his personal take on the world, all sorts of well-established, dominant, often repressive and technicized, interpretations of the real.¹⁴

Now, having highlighted some of the main characteristics and functions of the Orphan-child’s mythologem and of its “true fate” (36), to use Kerényi’s expression, as a culture hero, capable in times of darkness of awakening the community from its state of sleepiness to an open-ended interpretation of the real, I would like to go back to the first part of this chapter in order to establish one last, significant, connection between Deleuze and Kerényi, in regards to the important ethical and political implications of, respectively, the “time-image” and the concept of “genuine myth”--with specific reference to the emergence of the Orphan-child mythologem within the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s.

As the conclusive chapter of *Cinema II* seems to suggest, one of Deleuze’s main concerns appears to be that of overcoming the dangers of a totalitarian use of cinema, conceived by Nazism as a mass-art of state propaganda and manipulation. In commenting, for instance, Syberberg powerful intuition that no information, whatever it might be, is sufficient to defeat Hitler, Deleuze notes that: “Up to the end, Nazism thinks itself in

menace, society has to keep watch in order for the signifying exchange not to be interrupted” (*Infancy* 91).

¹⁴ As Deleuze puts it: “Children are supplied with syntax like workers being given tools. [...] We should take him quite literally when Godard says children are political prisoners”. (*Negotiations* 38-39)

competition with Hollywood. [...] This is what compels Syberberg to say that the end-product of the movement-image is Leni Riefenstahl, and if Hitler is to be put on trial by cinema, it must be inside cinema, against Hitler the film-maker” (264). In this sense, the “power of falsity” of the crystal-image--as opposed to the “cliché reinforcement” of the movement-image--may appear also as a means of fighting against the radical ineffectiveness of all information, insofar as this latter always represents only “the minimum needed for the satisfactory reception of *orders*” (*Negotiations* 41).¹⁵ To go beyond all pieces of spoken information is, according to Deleuze, “to extract from them a pure speech-act, creative story telling which is as it were the obverse side of the dominant myths, of current words and their supporters; an act capable of *creating the myth, instead of drawing profit or business from it* [my emphasis]” (*Cinema 2* 270).

Strikingly enough, the difference between creative story telling and dominant myths here established by Deleuze, closely echoes the fundamental distinction operated by Kerényi between, what he calls, “genuine myths” and “technicized myths.” Being a mythologist and having experienced directly the consequences of German Nazism, Kerényi--who was forced to seek refuge with his family in Switzerland in 1943--knew all too well the dangers hidden in certain political uses of myth. This is precisely why, in the long “wake” of postwar Europe, he continued to fight vigorously against Hitler’s “*religione di morte*” (*Demone* 114; “religion of death”) and never ceased to reaffirm that it was *not* myth that had to be blamed for the horrors of Nazism; as many war criminals have stated over and over again, presenting it as

¹⁵ In commenting Syberberg’s words, Deleuze writes: “All the documents could be shown, all the testimonies could be heard, but in vain: what makes information all-powerful (the newspapers, and then the radio, and then the television), is its very nullity, its radical ineffectiveness. [...] This is why it is necessary to go beyond information in order to defeat Hitler or turn the image over” (*Cinema 2* 169).

some sort of irrational and extra-human force that was able to take hold of them. On the contrary, “è l'uomo che dev'essere curato” (*Demone* 58; “it is *Man* that needs to be cured”), precisely because myth is nothing but “mito dell'uomo” (*Briccone* 2; “myth of *Man*”), that is, something both *created by* and *inherent to* the human.¹⁶

In this regard, Kerényi's incredibly acute--and much needed!--distinction between genuine and technicized myths is probably the most significant of all his contributions to the science of mythology. If a genuine myth is an infinitely un-closed elaboration of the real, characterized by spontaneity and absence of scope, a technicized myth always has, conversely, a direct applicability, it is always oriented towards certain political interests or aims that can never be truly collective, is so far as they are only the expression of a specific (usually dominant) social group.¹⁷ In other words, every technicized myth:

¹⁶ In one of the interviews with Bernard Stiegler contained in *Ecographies of Television*, Jaques Derrida significantly explains how difficult it is to pose certain questions, without being immediately dismissed (as many critics have done both with Deleuze and Kerényi): “To accuse those who ask questions about man, reason, etc., of being inhuman or irrational is a reflex, even a completely primitive fright. [...] If one were to follow it out, especially in its ethicopolitical consequences, this compulsive reflex would lead to the death of the question, of science, of philosophy. And it may well be that this is the undeclared aim of this disturbing resistance” (109).

¹⁷ In his essay *Mito e linguaggio della collettività*, Furio Jesi uses the categories established by Kerényi to present an illuminating example of technicized myth: “Nel 34 a. C. Antonio, vincitore dell'Armenia, fece coniare ad Alessandria monete che lo raffiguravano insieme con la tiara reale armena, e monete che raffiguravano Cleopatra in veste di ‘nuova Iside’. Queste figurazioni costituivano quasi una risposta a quelle che la politica di Augusto aveva ispirato ai vasai aretini: alle coppe di terra sigillata che alludevano ad Antonio e a Cleopatra, evocando il mito di Ercole e Onfale, l'uno vestito di abiti femminili, l'altra ammantata della pelle di leone e recante in pugno la clava. Le propagande di Alessandria e di Roma avevano fatto ricorso al mito come repertorio di immagini capaci di agire efficacemente sulle masse e di avvolgere le personalità dei contendenti di un'aura di divinità vittoriosa e salvatrice o di feroce ridicolo. Le immagini usate, sia quella di Iside, sia quella di Ercole e Onfale, appartenevano ad un patrimonio comune a vasti strati delle popolazioni soggette alle due potenze in lotta. Ricorrere ad esse con precise finalità di propaganda politica non significava però far appello a ciò che veramente costituiva un vincolo comune tra le varie genti. La deformazione tecnicistica del mito non era altro che una mostruosa distorsione del sentimento religioso, destinata a privarlo del suo valore di collettività—di là dalle singole fedi—ed a ridurlo a un vaneggiamento sonnambolico, notturno, di uomini in ‘stato di sonno’” (*Letteratura* 44; “In 34 B.C., having just conquered Armenia, Anthony gave order to mint in Alexandria a series of coins that portrayed him with the royal Armenian tiara and Cleopatra in guise of ‘new Isis’. These figurations represented

[...] è dominato dall'intenzione, dall'orientamento verso una certa meta, mentre l'evento del mito genuino è pensabile solo come l'espandersi di una sorgente, solo come spontaneità [...] Ma né l'esigenza di verità, né l'applicabilità vi appaiono di particolare rilievo. L'una e l'altra potrebbero essere inesistenti e tuttavia le immagini e i racconti rimarrebbero. (*Dal mito* 154-6) '[...] is dominated by intentionality, by the orientation towards a goal, whereas the epiphany of a genuine myth can be described only as a streaming out or an unfolding. [...] Neither the exigency of truthfulness, nor the need of applicability, are particularly relevant. Both of these aspects could be totally absent, but its images and its tales would nevertheless continue to exist'.

In a way, the profound strength and powerfulness of mythology lies precisely in the fact that a genuine myth can never be considered--to paraphrase Godard--"a *just* myth," that is, a myth that wants to confirm something, by closing itself on a well-established percept. On the contrary, a genuine myth is always "just a myth," a spontaneous and collective *un-*closed elaboration of the real, something that actually resembles the openness and the becoming of the Deleuzian time-image.¹⁸

Now, drawing on the works of the great Hungarian mythologist, his Italian disciple Furio Jesi rightly professed a profound trust not only "nella perenne possibilità delle epifanie

almost an answer to those that the politics of Augustus had inspired to the potters of Arezzo: clay goblets that alluded to Anthony and Cleopatra by evoking the myth of Hercules and Omphale, the first dressed up in feminine clothes, the latter covered with a lionskin and clutching a club in her hand. The propagandas of Alexandria and Rome had turned to myth as a repertory of images capable of influencing the masses by shrouding the personalities of the two adversaries in an aura either of victorious, redeeming divinity or of ferocious ridiculousness. The images used here, both the one of Isis and the one of Hercules and Omphale, were part of a heritage that was common to large strata of the populations subject to the two powers at odds. Using such images with a specific political aim was not a way to appeal to what might actually represent a common bond amongst people. Such technicized deformation of myth was nothing but a monstrous distortion of the religious sentiment, destined to deprive it of its collective value – beyond all single faiths – while reducing it to a somnambulant, nightly raving, of people in a 'state of sleepiness'").

¹⁸ As noted by Marcia Landy in *Just an image: Godard, Cinema, and Philosophy*: "Through Godard's consistent attention to the 'justness' of an image, his work has sought to free the cinema and its spectators from unthinking forms of automatism. In Deleuze's terms, but paraphrasing Godard: 'It is not a matter of following a chain of images, even across voids, but of getting out of the chain of association. Film ceases to 'be images in a chain...an uninterrupted chain of images each one the slave of the next,' and whose slave we are'" (29).

mitiche guaritrici” (*Letteratura* 27; “in the perennial possibility of the healing mythical epiphanies”), but also and foremost, in the centrality of human behavior as such, conceived essentially as expression of liberty and virtue--in the Greek sense of the term *areté*--insofar as these latter “consentono all’uomo di essere tale, e quindi di affrontare senza isterilirsi né soccombere le crisi della storia”(*Letteratura* 27; “allow man to be himself, and therefore face without succumbing, nor becoming sterile, the crisis in history”), just like in the profound humanism to be found at the center of the Italian Neorealist experience.

Consequently, the artist, in Jesi’s eyes, is invested with a fundamental role: “operare dentro di sé la guarigione dei mali che minacciano l’umanità” (*Letteratura* 39; “operate within himself the healing from the wrongs that threaten humanity”). But equally important, for Jesi, is the role played by the collectivity as a whole, conceivable as a community of men that acknowledge each other through their reciprocal respect, instead of privileging their ethical deviances and misdeeds. As Jesi writes in *Letteratura e mito*: “Se l’uomo parla all’uomo con il linguaggio che deriva dalla sua esperienza del mito genuino, la quale conferisce al linguaggio valore di oggettività e collettività, è probabile che si ottenga un passo innanzi verso una società fondata sul rispetto dell’uomo” (44; “If man speaks to man with the language that derives from his experience of the genuine myth, which confers to language itself a value of objectivity and collectivity, it is likely that we might take a step forward towards a society built on human respect”).

At the same time, though, Jesi is very much aware--like Kerényi--that the risks connected to the technicization of myth always lie in wait. Whenever, in fact, the common denominator of an entire society becomes the willful creation of myths purposely deformed and exploited from above as an element of cohesion, like in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy,

we cannot but witness the progressive and inexorable predominance of what Jesi calls “le forze oscure” (*Letteratura* 40; “the dark forces”). In other words, we must always keep in mind that no myth can ever be totally immune from the risk of becoming technicized; not even the myth of “awakening” discussed in this chapter, as the battle cry written on Nazi banners ominously reminds us: “Deutschland, erwache!” (“Germany, awake!”).

To conclude, if the connection I have tried to establish between the double set of antinomies here elucidated--movement-image vs. time-image, on one side, and technicized myth vs. genuine myth, on the other--can be considered acceptable, the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940--at least in some of its most relevant cinematic and literary outcomes--might then be interpreted as a possible antidote to the technicized myths and clichés perpetuated by Fascist camp-thinking, an attempt to bring about an awakening in/to an open-ended community, through the powerful prism of the Orphan-child mythologem, after the state of sleepiness of totalitarianism.

Commenting on C. G. Jung’s approach to myth, some twenty years after their collaboration, Kerényi noted that, if we are to retain something of Jung’s psychology, it is probably the following axiom: “One could say that, if it were possible to suddenly erase all of the world’s traditions, for the generations-to-come mythology and the history of religions would start all over again” (*Essays* 161). In other words, it is precisely myth that seems to be constantly reborn in the wake of destruction and it is therefore not accidental, as the next two chapters of my dissertation will engage in illustrating, that the primordial mythologem par excellence--the Orphan-child--has closely haunted, like a Derridian ghost, Italian cinema, literature and culture of the 1940s.

CHAPTER 2

The Mythologem of the Orphan-child in Italian Neorealist Cinema

This second chapter focuses on the progressive emergence of the Orphan-child mythologem within the cinematic Neorealist production of the 1940s, by focusing on three key movies of the time: Vittorio De Sica's *The Children Are Watching Us* (1943), Roberto Rossellini's *Open City* (1945), and Vittorio De Sica's *Miracle in Milan* (1951). As the dates show, the three movies belong to three very different, but equally important, moments in the development of Italian Neorealism: respectively, the decline of the Fascist *zeitgeist*, the end of WWII, and the height of the reconstruction process. But in all three films, as we will see, the ethical function of the Orphan-child is to either disrupt or open up to new possibilities the encamped reality that surrounds him.

Hence, my reading of these three works aims at retracing and analyzing the specific “sites of subversion” associated with the mythologem of the Orphan-child, that is, the textual and visual instances in which the intrinsic liminality, as well as the perceptive and linguistic subversiveness of this figure, seem capable of confronting the audience with an estranged image of the real, thus embodying the Deleuzian ideal of “being foreign in one’s own language” (*Negotiations* 41), while fostering new ways of experiencing and experimenting with reality, after the “closedness” of Fascism and in direct opposition to every Bourgeois camp-thinking attitude. Once again, as anticipated in chapter one, we must not forget that “up to the end, Nazism thinks itself in competition with Hollywood. [...] and if Hitler is to be put on trial by cinema, it must be inside cinema, against Hitler the film-maker” (*Cinema 2* 264).

As for the choice of including in my analysis of the Neorealist experience a fantasy-driven movie like *Miracle in Milan*, I can only say that, to me, this work of art fully belongs to the Neorealist un-closed way of looking at the world, as my detailed analysis of the film will engage in demonstrating. More in general, as justly noted by Lucia Re, we should always keep in mind that: “[...] imagination does not seek a visionary transcendence of the here and now, but rather the disclosure of perspectives and possibilities that generate a critical understanding of the present reality and of its full range of potential meanings. [Just like] the representation of reality is not the ‘re-presentation’ of real events, no matter what it may claim to be or to do” (152;171).

De Sica’s *The Children Are Watching Us*: A Subversive Orphanization

The traditional Bourgeois and Fascist concept of the family has been acutely defined by Furio Jesi, in *Germania segreta* (1967), as a closed, fortified microcosm, whose safeness and “serenity” is only apparent, insofar as the major threats to its falsely inexpugnable walls are often coming not from the outside, but from *within*. Analogously, Paul Gilroy has amply demonstrated that camp-thinking inevitably affects even the supposed beneficiaries of the enclosed camp by forcing them to exclude, amputate, or subdue, whatever is deemed external and/or detrimental to the unity of the camp itself. But the “excluded” will often come back to haunt the camp, like a Derridian ghost. According to Jesi, in fact, the fortified, Bourgeois, microcosm of the family is destined to crumble and fall precisely because: “L’istituto matrimoniale borghese non regge all’affiorare di forze oscure nelle quali dovrebbe invece risiedere il fondamento saldo, profondo e misterioso dell’unione sessuale” (*Germania* 125; “The bourgeois institution of marriage cannot stand the surfacing of dark forces in which should actually reside the deep, staunch, and mysterious foundation of sexual connection”).

By putting into question precisely the internal and external mechanisms, both social and psychological, that dominate a typical petit-bourgeois family, De Sica was able to successfully portray in his 1943 movie, *The Children Are Watching Us*, a much larger situation of ethical breakup. Based on *Pricò*, a rather conventional and *larmoyant* novel published by Cesare Giulio Viola in 1922, and written with the fundamental contribution of scriptwriter Cesare Zavattini, the film actually opens up to capture and portray an entire *zeitgeist*, while focusing on the powerful emotions and reactions of its five-year old protagonist: Pricò. The little boy acts in the film as the desolate, but uncompromising, witness to the crumbling of his own world in a claustrophobic, petit-bourgeois context, characterized by false pretenses, subterfuges and lies, to which he can only oppose, in the end, his ethical and subversive refusal by consciously embracing, as we will see, the condition of the Orphan-child.

The film begins with the mother's hard-fought decision to abandon her family and flee to Genoa with her secret lover, Roberto. The father, incapable on his part of dealing with the scandalous situation, leaves Pricò first with the aunt, and then with the grandmother, both of who will turn out to be completely self-centered and pitiless. The unexpected return of the mother, apparently repentant, is a sign of good hope: the father is willing to forgive her for the child's (and the family's) own sake and the three of them seem to find a renewed harmony, at least by the Bourgeois standards of the time. But the summer vacations spent in a rich seaside town, amongst shallow and pretentious people, will be disastrous: tracked down by her lover, the mother ends up abandoning a second time her child and husband. Grief-stricken, the latter is now forced by the internal mechanisms of a typically dignified bourgeois society to send Pricò to a boarding school. Here, the child will soon be reached by

the terrible news of his father's suicide, but, this time, instead of seeking comfort in his mother's arms, he will prefer to hug the old nanny, before turning his back once and for all on his mother and, more metaphorically, on the entire world she represents.¹⁹

The first merit of this subtly subversive film is its overt willingness to engage with disquieting themes and issues, such as petit-bourgeois adultery and suicide, or the unhappiness of children, which were deemed taboos by the Fascist censorship of the time. As Massimo Garritano pointed out, *The Children Are Watching Us* can be interpreted above all as “una metafora del disfacimento del fascismo in quanto sistema di pensiero, attraverso due gesti che appaiono ‘rivoluzionari’ per quegli anni: l’adulterio e il suicidio” (57; “a metaphor of the collapsing of Fascism as a way of thinking, thanks to two gestures which appear ‘revolutionary’ for the time: adultery and suicide”). This is undoubtedly true: compared to the so-called *telefoni bianchi* movies of those years, evasively set in exotically distant kingdoms or unattainable past epochs, De Sica's film appeared as an unexpected and subversive wakeup call for the audiences of 1943. Moreover, the film is particularly successful in problematizing the bourgeois triangle by changing its focus from the usual

¹⁹ In his reading of the film, Gualtiero De Santi notes that: “Vittorio De Sica dà l’avvio a una operazione—un metodo aperto già pronunzio delle libertà neorealistiche, ma anche una riflessione etica, una ricomposizione meditativa—che spinge a ricollocare quella aspra, scontrosa materia non già e solo dentro le coscienze e gli ambiti esigui delle relazioni interfamiliari, ma frammezzo al contesto vivo del tempo [...] Il conflitto sul piano morale e storico (e sociale) è appunto con un determinato mondo in sfacelo, che il fascismo oggettivamente figurava. (32-33; “Vittorio De Sica initiates a process—an open-ended method that anticipates the neorealist freedoms, as well as an ethical reflection, a meditative reassembly—which pushes us to relocate such a harsh and stark material not so much within the conscience and the narrow sphere of the family relations, but in the actual, real, context of those times [...] The conflict from a moral and historical (as well as social) point of view is precisely with a specific world that was falling apart and that Fascism objectively reflected”).

suspects—the husband, the wife, and the lover—to the figure of the child-protagonist, who becomes here the true bearer of the looming tragedy’s weight.²⁰

But, besides adultery and suicide, there is also a third truly revolutionary gesture that, to my knowledge, critics have not yet underlined. It is the ending itself, which can be interpreted here as a subversive “orphanization” of the main character: a sorrowful five-year old who willfully turns his back once and for all on his family and on everything it represents. Pricò’s conscious acceptance of his orphan’s fate acquires then the sense of an ethical choice, which transforms him, as we will see, into a powerful symbol of revolt against the encamped, fortified, and falsely serene microcosm of the agonizing Italian Bourgeoisie.

Now, if we start analyzing the movie in depth, we can see that the opening sequence functions almost as a classical meta-narrative prologue, a sort of abridged *mise en abyme* of the entire film’s plot, insofar as the puppet-show actually stages and anticipates the fatal love triangle that is about to be revealed in the movie: two men fight over the same woman until one of them dies.²¹ The subtle connection between this scene and the movie’s plot is made

²⁰ In this regard, Lino Micciché has argued that *The Children Are Watching Us*: “è il film della coscienza borghese in crisi, che implica la denuncia della complicità morale col fascismo perché implica e vede criticamente la morale che la borghesia con il fascismo aveva difeso e per la quale gli aveva dato la propria complicità [...] *I bambini ci guardano* è in questo senso il corrispettivo di *Ossessione* sia pure su una linea completamente diversa. Nel film di Visconti la critica alla società è fatta di sangue, di sensualità esasperata, di foia delittuosa intrisa di umori anarchici. In De Sica tutto è visto con apparente pacata delicatezza, ma non per questo con minore convinzione e meno peruasiva efficacia” (157-159; “It’s the film of the bourgeois conscience’s crisis, which implies the denunciation of its moral complicity with Fascism, insofar as it puts into question the morality that the Bourgeoisie had attempted to preserve with Fascism by granting it its own complicity. [...] *The Children Are Watching Us* is, in this sense, the equivalent of *Obsession*, albeit on a completely different level. In Visconti’s film, the sociological critique is made of blood, exasperated sensuality, murderous lust, full of anarchic sentiments. In De Sica everything is seen apparently with calm delicacy, but with no less conviction or persuasive effectiveness”).

²¹ We must note here that, at the end of the film, Pricò’s father is not actually killed by the wife’s lover, but is driven to commit suicide instead.

even more clear in Pricò's unsettling dream, later on in the film, where the murderous male and female puppets appear to haunt the child's conscience as they slowly turn into his mother and her lover, thus demonstrating how relevant that initial scene is: an image of violence that has deeply affected Pricò, if only unconsciously.

But the puppet-show sequence functions as a meta-narrative prologue also for a different reason, insofar as it allows De Sica to establish right away his ethical standpoint. During the scene of the killing, in fact, the camera suddenly cuts from the puppet-show to a little child in the audience who starts crying and tries to hug the mother. The woman, on her part, dismisses this reaction as a silly one and encourages the child to look on: "No! Guarda, guarda!" ("Come on! Look, look!") We may consider it, at first, an amusing little scene, but, at a closer look, it becomes clear that the child's "pure" gaze (as well as De Sica's camera) reads and interprets the puppet-show for what it really is: a disquieting image of abuse, violence, and death, strengthened by the child's inability to distinguish between reality and fiction. It is not simply a parodic reversal of the adulterous affair depicted in the film, it is actually the first act of child's abuse portrayed in the movie. Moreover, De Sica's ethical condemnation of the way the adult world relates to children continues, even more significantly, in the backstage of the puppet-theater, where we see the two puppeteers insulting and tugging ill-manneredly at a young girl, possibly their daughter, because they deem her too slow in collecting the audience's money: "Maria! Vai, stupida!" ("Maria! Go, you stupid girl!")

From a purely narrative point of view, both of the above mentioned shots may actually appear irrational cuts, insofar as they add nothing to the main plot and have no apparent cause-effect link with the main puppet-theater sequence, but in fact they are

fundamental in portraying and assessing right from the beginning the ethical standpoint of the film. In other words, what De Sica is trying to establish here is precisely what Deleuze calls a time-image: a mental link--rather than an action-driven one--which makes new cerebral circuits possible, insofar as it forces the audience to find a different type of connection between the two shots.

Overall, it is not by chance that the movie opens right away with a powerful, albeit indirect, critique on De Sica's part of the ways in which the adult world relates to children. The title itself, *The Children Are Watching Us*, can in fact be read as a heartened appeal/warning to the sense of responsibility that each one of us must bear in his or her relationship with children, precisely because we, as adults, should always be held accountable for our behaviors and attitudes. Once again, as Garritano puts it:

È il titolo stesso del film, quanto mai chiarificatore, a rimarcare l'originalità del "punto di vista": la macchina da presa sono gli occhi del bambino che seguono i fatti salienti del racconto, che scrutano e giudicano il comportamento degli adulti e quasi "pedinano," in termini zavattiniani, I gesti dei grandi, in particolare quei gesti tipici legati all'amore e alla sessualità che si presentano al bambino come un universo misterioso che progressivamente si svela una realtà di inganni e sofferenze. (58)
(It's the title itself, particularly effective, that stresses the originality of the "point of view": the camera is the child's gaze, which follows the main turns in the plot, pries into and judges the adults' behavior, and almost "tails," in the Zavattinian sense of the term, the gestures of grownups, specifically those connected to love and sexuality, which appear to the child as a mysterious universe, that will in turn reveal itself as a reality made of deceptions and suffering).

One of the most striking and revealing aspects about the film is that (with the paradoxical exception of the painful and remorse-ridden adultery of the main plot) all the love bonds depicted by De Sica seem to be driven either by some sort of light-hearted personal gain or by shallow eroticism, thus appearing almost as reprehensible because of

their superficiality: from the aunt's relationship with a much older and richer *commendatore*; to the vacuous chit-chat of the four dressmakers, commenting excitedly on the sexual revelry of one of them; to the not-too-innocent crush of Paolina for the local pharmacist; to the short but poignant scene of a random couple at the Alassio train station, in which the woman asks "Addio, caro. Pensami! Mi scriverai?" ("Farewell, my love. Think of me! Will you write me?") and the man on the platform doesn't even bother to answer, but asks instead a casual question, while continuing to read his newspaper.

Interestingly enough, the one thing that all of the above mentioned scenes have in common is the actual presence of Pricò, who functions (together with us) as the silent witness of the vacuous world depicted by De Sica. In the child's presence, adults my often speak in half sentences--like the mother, the aunt, and the grandmother--or lower their tone of voice--like the dressmakers or Paolina--but their actions eventually betray their true intentions in the eyes of Pricò, as well as in our own. As stated by Deleuze in *Negotiations*, this type of "visionary cinema" has replaced the agent with the seer and the character has gained in an ability to see what he has lost in action or reaction (51). In a way, what we are dealing with here, is a reinterpretation of the child's "pure gaze" trope, finally capable of shedding light from within and with honesty on the cracks that begin to appear in the fortified walls of the Italian Bourgeoisie, in total contrast with the models imposed up until then by the Fascist ideology. As Fellini once said: "Neorealism is a way of seeing reality without prejudice , [...] not just social reality but all that there is within a man" (152). Once again, the ethical attempt of the film is to actively put into question what Paul Gilroy calls camp-thinking--an all-encompassing, closed elaboration of the real--by fostering a new way of experiencing and experimenting with reality, that is, an actual neo-realism: a *new* way of looking at the world.

In this perspective, we, as spectators, first learn about the mother's love affair precisely *through* Pricò's eyes and the change in his facial expression when he first "sees," thanks to the purity of his gaze, the threat that the man talking to his mother in the park represents. Analogously, Roberto's face will express a mixed sense of surprise and guilt when, later on in the movie, he realizes that his love effusions on the beach are being silently witnessed by Pricò, as De Sica's masterful use of the shot-reverse-shot technique readily reveals to us. But it is not only the child's gaze to be subtly subversive. His words too tend to give an estranged image of the real, thus accomplishing the Deleuzian ideal of "being foreign in one's own language" (*Negotiations* 41), while putting into question well-established and socially accepted interpretations of the real.

At a closer analysis, we can identify several sites of subversion in which Pricò acts as a sort of *bocca della verità* (mouth of truth), which inevitably forces the adults that surround him--or the audience, at least--to think and look at the world differently. In one of the initial scenes of the movie, for instance, we see the mother putting to bed the little boy. Before kissing him goodnight, she makes him recite a prayer, that is, she briskly requires him to repeat after her every single verse of it. This closed mechanism, conceivable here as a Deleuzian "sensory-motor schema" (*Cinema 2* 20) transposed into the realm of language, seems to proceed smoothly right until the end of the prayer, when, all of a sudden, the linguistic machine jams. Pricò, in fact, breaks loose of the sensory-motor schema first by transposing the actual words of the prayer into a purely rhythmical sound diversion: the Italian "che ti fu" ("that was to you") turns into the playful and nonsensical expression "katafù", repeated three times in crescendo. Then, most importantly, instead of simply repeating the conclusive expression "la pietà celeste" ("celestial mercy"), the little boy adds a

comment of his own: “la pietà celeste...e rosa” (“celestial...and pink”), insofar as “celeste” in Italian is, first of all, a synonym for the color blue. In other words, from the child’s perspective, there is no specific reason why heavenly mercy should be only blue. On the contrary, it might be both blue *and* pink. Of course, it is just an image, or just an idea--as opposed to a *just* idea, to paraphrase French director Jean-Luc Godard--but it is precisely this that makes it all the more powerful and revolutionary. As Deleuze puts it:

And...and...and... is precisely a creative stammering, a foreign use of language [...] AND is neither one thing, nor the other, it’s always in between, between two things; it’s the borderline, there’s always a border, a line of flight or flow, only we don’t see it, because it’s the least perceptible of things. And yet it’s along this line of flight that things come to pass, becomings evolve, revolutions take place. (*Negotiations* 38-41)

Now, going back to the opening of the movie, the first site of verbal subversion in Pricò’s attitude towards the adult world appears right at the end of the park sequence, when, after his significantly stubborn refusal to greet Signor Roberto, he looks up at his mother and asks her, as they are leaving: “Mamma, piangi?” (“Mom, are you crying?”) Two simple but very powerful words, capable here of breaking through the wall of hypocrisy erected by the typically dignified Bourgeois demeanor of the mother and that inevitably force her to lie: “No, e perché dovrei?” (“No, why should I?”) This same, potentially subversive, attitude of Pricò reappears again later in the movie, when, having just recovered from his nightmarish illness, he asks his mother for three times: “Perché non ti levi il cappello?” (“Why don’t you take off your hat?”): another simple but revealing question, which the woman is once again incapable of answering, since it would force her to disclose the real cause of her absence.

A third, even more relevant, site of verbal subversion can be identified in Pricò’s reaction to one of Paolina’s remarks, the girl supposedly in charge of keeping him out of

trouble during the time spent at his grandmother's place. The two of them are walking down the street, but as they pass the pharmacy, the girl insistently turns around to exchange a series of explicit looks with the pharmacist, who is standing outside the shop. Pricò witnesses on his part the exchanges but is incapable of interpreting them and looks up at the girl for an explanation. Having been caught red-handed, the girl reacts with another typically dignified and bourgeois demeanor, "Non ci si rivolta per la strada" ("It is not proper to stare at people in the street"), to which Pricò readily answers: "E tu perché ti volti?" ("Why do you do it then?"). Once again, it is just a remark, as opposed to a *Just* remark, but precisely because of its simplicity, it is all the more powerful in exposing the hypocrisy and double standard that the Bourgeois microcosm is more than willing to embrace and apply whenever it feels threatened, either from the inside or from the outside.

As it appears clear from all these examples, while children do watch and speak to us, we as adults are often unable to accept the implications of their pure gaze and/or deal with their inconvenient questions. Hence, Pricò's narrative and ethical function in all of the above-mentioned scenes is precisely that of subverting the world that surrounds him by inadvertently denouncing its subterfuges and mechanisms of denial. Overall, the film offers an estranged image of the real by focusing precisely on what De Santi insightfully calls "angelismo eversivo" (37; "subversive angelicism") of children, a social and ethical attitude amply analyzed by Giorgio Agamben in his seminal work *Infanzia e storia* (1978). As Cesare Zavattini himself never ceased to repeat in his interviews, letters, and writings:

Noi li appartiamo, ma essi già vedono con i loro occhi, odono con le loro orecchie, giudicano, i bambini ci guardano insomma e ci giudicano e noi sembriamo affannati a impedire che esprimano questi loro giudizi, che sono spesso impressionanti, rivelatori, geniali, pieni di una esperienza misteriosa, con un suo tempo misterioso. (qt. in Siciliani de Cumis 53).

(We keep them aside, but they see with their own eyes, listen with their own ears, pass judgments, children do watch us after all and judge us and we seem desperate to stop them from expressing those judgments, which are often impressive, revealing, brilliant, full of a mysterious experience, with a mysterious timing of their own).

In inaugurating their exceptionally fruitful collaboration--after their initial, underground, contacts for *Teresa Venerdì* in 1941--Zavattini gave a fundamental contribution to De Sica's epistemological break with the shallow, mindless, and escapist cinema of the time.²² If read along these lines, the social control and morbid curiosity that animates in the film close relatives, friends, neighbors, and hotel guests alike, is the perfect incarnation of that "società ipocrita, bugiarda" ("hypocrite, lying society"), that De Sica openly identified as the main target of his attack, and that is here willfully portrayed in direct contrast to the subtle subversiveness of *Pricò*.²³

Accordingly, all of the adult characters in the movie--with the sole, albeit significant, exception of the old nanny--are portrayed somewhat negatively. None of them, in fact, seems capable of establishing a true, compassionate, loving connection with *Pricò*, and this is true not only of family members and friends, but also of all the minor or secondary characters that punctuate the plot: from the magician at the hotel, who is evidently annoyed by his presence

²² The title itself, for instance, was suggested to De Sica by Zavattini, insofar as it was inspired by "I nostri bambini ci guardano" 'our children are watching us', a weekly column, signed by Zavattini in the late '30s on the Italian women's magazine *Grazia*, whose official declaration of intent already anticipated the reversed perspective that we witness in the film: "Qui non si tratta di insegnare ai fanciulli come devono comportarsi, bensì come voi dovete comportarvi davanti ai fanciulli" ("Here it is not a matter of teaching children how to behave, but to teach how you should behave in their presence").

²³ As De Sica goes on to explain in an interview granted to Francesco Savio in 1974: "La piccola borghesia italiana che io descrivevo [in *I bambini ci guardano*] mi interessava per la sua meschinità e per la sua miseria morale. Ecco, il mio bersaglio era un fatto più importante (un fatto morale, o sociale), più importante che le vecchie commedie" (*Cinecittà* 489; "the petit-bourgeoisie I depicted [in *The Children Are Watching Us*] interested me for its pettiness, and for its moral misery. Yes, my target was something more relevant (something ethical, or social), more relevant than the old comedies").

(“Bambino, vai via...”; “Go away, kid...”), to the old lady at the railway station, who dismisses him with an arrogant nod, to the railroader on the tracks who chases him away (“Via da qua!”; “Get out of here!”), all the way to the drunken sailor on the beach who scares him just for fun or the two alleged representatives of the Law who suddenly loom over the little boy as a menacing presence, rather than a reassuring one. Moreover, Pricò’s desperate search for affection throughout the movie is significantly underlined by his repeated requests for a simple goodnight kiss (“Non mi dai un bacio?”; “Won’t you give me a kiss?”), to which the mother, Paolina, and possibly even Agnese, all seem oblivious, insofar as they all forget to bestow it spontaneously.

Ironically enough, even the family picture that the father decides to take on the beach to seal once and for all the renewed harmony between the three family members is actually ruined—without them knowing it—by a mischievous kid named Ulrico, who enters the picture behind their back and sticks his tongue out right before the click. It is almost a bad omen of the things to come, as if De Sica wanted to warn us that the happiness of this family reunion is only apparent and is not destined to last for long. Moreover, the fact that the mischievous kid actually belongs to the upper class and will later answer back to his own mother, quite aggressively: “Lasciami stare! Non voglio venire con te!” (“Leave me alone! I don’t want to come with you!”), while spitefully vexing a group of younger kids, simply adds another element of ethical condemnation to the falsely glamorous society portrayed in the seaside sequence.

And yet, one of the greatest accomplishments of the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s has been precisely its unique ability and willingness to acknowledge and render, both cinematographically and literarily, the actual complexity of the real. According to De

Santi, for instance: “Il realismo di De Sica non sceglie o strofineggia una cifra formale in cui lo stile scorra sempre uguale (sia pure sempre ad alto livello). C’è nel suo cinema una mobilità di innesti e investimenti espressivi, e anche di esiti fortuiti” (40; “De Sica’s realism does not opt for nor does it fondle a formal solution in which the style runs always identical to itself (albeit at a consistently high level). There is in his cinema a mobility of insertions and expressive investments, as well as fortuitous outcomes”). The same could be said about other Neorealist works of the 1940s: a movie like Roberto Rossellini’s *Open City* (1945) defies all cinema genres, just like Italo Calvino’s first novel, *The Path to the Spiders’ Nests* (1947) or Pavese’s *The Moon and the Bonfires* (1950) do not really belong to any readily available literary category.²⁴

Following along these same lines, De Santi is one of the few critics to have highlighted how incredibly complex the world depicted in *The Children Are Watching Us* actually is. In describing the mother’s remorse-ridden adultery, for instance, he insightfully points out the ambiguity of a love bond that is actually blameless, if read outside of the cultural coordinates of the time (32). Analogously, he notices how De Sica does not impose on the father the code of the betrayed husband, which, in the Italian custom, could be viciously violent (40). On the contrary, the film attempts to proceed against many of the stereotypes traditionally associated with the Bourgeois love-triangle, especially in comparison to the novel on which it is based, which is full of late-Romanticism simpering and excesses. What we are dealing with here, then, is an attempt to present the traditional petit-bourgeois triangle from a different perspective altogether, namely the child’s: a simple

²⁴ In this regard, both Lucia Re’s *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism: Fables of Estrangement* (1990) and Gregory Lucente’s *The Narrative of Realism and Myth: Verga, Lawrence, Faulkner, Pavese* (1981) have amply demonstrated how the abovementioned works effectively challenge the poetics of objectivity and realism traditionally associated with Italian Neorealism.

reversal which allows, though, for a radical condemnation of clichés, a condemnation that Deleuze justly identified as one of the main characteristics of Italian Neorealism as a whole.

Particularly revealing, in this sense, is the sequence in which the father is finally forced to face the truth as he reads the farewell telegram that his wife has sent him. Here, the shattering of the clichés traditionally associated with such scenes is achieved through what Deleuze would call a “disjunction of the sound and the visual” (*Cinema 2* 267), insofar as the 1939 song playing in the background, *Maramao perché sei morto*, does not fit the pathos of the sequence, but it creates instead an uncanny, ironic, and incommensurable “gap”. It is, yet again, an irrational (audio-visual) cut, capable of expressing how complex reality actually is, while anticipating, at the same time, the tragic death that is about to unfold. To quote Deleuze’s words:

[...] when the sound image and the visual image become heautonomous, they still constitute no less of an audio-visual image, all the purer in that the new correspondence is born from the determinate forms of their non-correspondence [...]. The visual image and the sound image are in a special relationship, a free indirect relationship (*Cinema 2* 260-1).

If the intrinsic limit of every camp-thinking attitude is its inability to account for and/or acknowledge the complexity of the real, then *The Children Are Watching Us* is actually successful in breaking through the clichés of Fascist cinema, while offering an estranged image of the real, which enables us, in turn, to be foreign in our own language and to free ourselves from dangerous forms of automatism. In other words, De Sica’s art is, most importantly, an art capable of changing the way we look at the world. Thanks to its unswerving take on reality, considered as something intrinsically complex and problematic, the theme of the Bourgeois triangle ceases to be banal and outworn. Once again, the ethical

path chosen by the orphanized child-protagonist functions as a powerful eye-opening experience and a relentless wake up call for past and present audiences.

To conclude, if we are to interpret Italian Neorealism first and foremost as an epistemological break from the Fascist frame-of-mind, a new way of experiencing and experimenting with the world after the closed-ness of totalitarianism, then Vittorio De Sica's 1943 film, *The Children Are Watching Us*, should be considered not a simply proto-Neorealist endeavor, as many critics have stated in the past, but a fully Neorealist one, precisely because of its overt willingness--and effectiveness--in putting into question several established precepts of Fascist camp-thinking, through the powerful prism of a subtly subversive, and highly symbolical, "orphanization" of its main character.

But if this is true, then, even the final shot of the film can be read as an open-ending full of *puissance*, which does not plunge us in a desperation unredeemed by any prospect of hope, as many critics seem to imply in their analysis, but is actually full of agency for the audience, insofar as it calls *us* into action. De Santi is right when he notices that all of reality's contradictions are still there, and that the film doesn't resolve the contrast between morality and family, adults and children. On the contrary, the film destroys a pattern, whose contradictions cannot be overcome (40). But, in my view, to cry out loud "the Emperor has no clothes" is already a powerful and subversive act of revolt, especially if its direct consequence is the willful and ethically charged self-orphanization of the main character, who consciously refuses in the end to be associated with the encamped, fortified, and falsely serene, microcosm of the agonizing Italian Bourgeoisie. As Jesi once wrote: "Riconoscere la malattia e la deformazione come tali e denunciarne l'orrore nell'istante stesso in cui se ne accusa l'inevitabilità, è già un atto di superamento" (*Germania* 95; "To recognize the malady

and the deformation as such and to denounce their horrific nature, while lamenting their inevitability, is already in and of itself an act to overcome both”).

Rossellini’s *Open City*: The Orphan-Child and the Mythological Re-foundation of Rome

Si può amare una città, si possono riconoscere le sue case e le sue strade nelle proprie più remote o più care memorie; ma solo nell’ora della rivolta la città è sentita veramente come la *propria* città: propria, poiché al tempo stesso dell’io e degli “altri”; propria, poiché campo di una battaglia che si è scelta e che la collettività ha scelto; propria poiché spazio circoscritto in cui il tempo storico è sospeso. (*Spartakus*, 25)

(One can love a city, recognize its houses and streets in one’s dearest and most remote memories; but it is only in the hour of the revolt that the city truly becomes one’s *own* city: one’s own, because it belongs to the I and to the “others”; one’s own, because it is the field of a battle chosen personally and collectively; one’s own, because it becomes the circumscribed space in which historical time is suspended.)

What Jesi touches upon here, in analyzing the Spartacist movement in the Berlin of 1919, may well apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the Resistance movement in the Rome of 1944, powerfully portrayed by Roberto Rossellini in the movie *Open City*. After all, war and revolt both entail a suspension of historical time or, to use Agamben’s expression, a “state of exception” (*Homo* 12), in direct contrast--albeit only apparently--to the traditional, Bourgeois concept of time. As Jesi puts it: “Il *tempo normale* è non solo un concetto borghese, ma il frutto di una manipolazione borghese del tempo. Esso garantisce alla società borghese una tranquilla durata. Ma può essere deliberatamente sospeso quando sia conveniente” (*Spartakus*, 30; “*Normal time* is not only a bourgeois concept, but also the end product of a bourgeois manipulation of time. It provides bourgeois society with a placid duration. But it can be deliberately suspended if it’s deemed convenient to do so”). Such a suspension is usually aimed at establishing a technicized and closed elaboration of the real, perfectly incarnated by the martial laws that every modern Nation-State is more than willing to pass in

order to assure its self-preservation in times of war. However, on some rare occasions, brought about by a political and/or cultural revolt, as in the Spartacist movement of 1919 or the Italian Resistance of the mid 1940s, the suspension of historical time can actually allow for the sudden epiphany of a genuinely mythical time; a time in which: “l’uomo è capace di ricondurre a unità il passato e il presente attingendo al mito” (*Germania*, 99; “Man is capable of reconnecting the past with the present by drawing on myth”).

In this perspective, the Neorealist experience of the 1940s might well be described also as a new experience of time, an attempt to suspend the technicized time of Fascism and Nazism and bring about the epiphany of a genuinely humanist time. Going back to Deleuze, if the movement-image corresponds to a closed mechanism of cause and effect, aimed at reproducing over and over again the historical time of the dominant social group, then the time-image might be interpreted as a suspension or a breakdown of such mechanism, capable of creating an alternative, more open-ended, experience of time itself. What is at stake in Rossellini’s 1945 movie *Open City*, then, is nothing less than the mythological re-foundation of Rome as such: an attempt to de-construct the *agalma* of the Urbs erected by Fascist rhetoric, while re-founding the city on a more genuine basis, by opening it to the *puissance* of renewal traditionally associated with the mythologem of the Orphan-child.

Shot in the summer of 1944, the film retraces, over a three-day period, the fight for freedom against the Nazi occupation of Rome after September 8 1943, when the capital of Italy was officially recognized by the Germans as an “open city,” that is, a city that could not be subject to occupation, attack, and military control. In reality, the Nazi and Fascist troops never respected this designation and the Resistance movement that ensued is portrayed by Rossellini through various magnifying lenses, each representing a different character, whose

story is closely intertwined with everyone else's in a truly choral fresco. Francesco, a typographer working for the underground Communist newspaper *L'Unità*, is betrothed to Pina, a widow with an eight-year-old son named Marcello and another one soon to be born; Don Pietro, who is willing to celebrate the wedding, is a catholic priest allied with the partisan forces, whereas Manfredi, who is sentimentally involved with Pina's sister, Marina, a beautiful but shallow theater starlet with drug-addiction problems, is one of the chief-partisans hunted down by the Gestapo throughout the film.

Following a plot that is vaguely reminiscent of Manzoni's *The Betrothed*--as acutely noted by Lucia Re--on the actual day of the marriage, Francesco is arrested in a Nazi roundup and Pina is cruelly shot dead by a German soldier as she runs desperately after the convoy carrying her loved-one away. Francesco, on his part, is unexpectedly freed soon after by a group of partisans who attack the convoy carrying him, and subsequently seeks refuge, together with Manfredi, at Marina's place. But in the end, the girl, openly rejected by Manfredi because of her shallowness and unwillingness to change, decides to avenge herself by secretly denouncing him and Francesco to the Gestapo, while receiving more drugs and a fur in exchange. The following morning, as the men are about to leave the city for a safer hiding place, Manfredi is arrested, together with Don Pietro, whereas Francesco manages to escape. The subsequent death under torture of Manfredi, who heroically refuses to talk, and the execution by marshal law of Don Pietro, desolately witnessed by the now-orphaned Marcello and by his little friends, close the film on an double-sided note of desperation and hope, as those same kids, to whom the future of Rome is now entrusted, walk down the highly symbolic Via Trionfale, towards a soon-to-be-freed city and a potentially renovated idea of civilization.

In an article significantly entitled “Open City: *Reappropriating the Old, Making the New*”, Sydney Gottlieb effectively demonstrates how Rossellini’s 1945 film contests Fascism not only by portraying and glorifying the Resistance, but also and foremost by opposing and overcoming the Fascist control over myths, symbols, institutions, values. According to Gottlieb, in fact, “Rossellini answers what Bosworth calls the Fascist claim to ownership of the ‘myth of Rome’ and what Marcus calls ‘Fascist mythomania’ by constructing, at least cinematographically, a countermyth” (20). In his article, Gottlieb offers several examples of such reversals occurring in various realms: domesticity, motherhood, springtime, etc. But there is one, very powerful, countermyth that no one, to my knowledge, has yet highlighted: it’s the countermyth of the Orphan-child, whose subversive *puissance*, in direct contrast with the Fascist use of this same mythologem, represents a powerful attempt to bring about a de-fascistized re-foundation of the Eternal City, as my reading of the movie’s final sequence will demonstrate.

Now, if we start analyzing the movie in depth, we can notice that, just like the Berlin of 1919, the Rome of 1944 is the exact opposite of what a city should be: Man is here literally expelled from its houses. Right at the beginning of the film, for instance, Manfredi is forced to flee from his lodging and to hide henceforth. Similarly, later on in the movie, all the inhabitants of the tenement building where Pina and her family live are forced to leave their apartments during a Nazi roundup. Francesco, on his part, cannot return to his house after being freed by his fellow comrades, but is forced instead to seek refuge, together with Manfredi, first at Marina’s place, and then elsewhere. As Jesi justly points out, once again in reference to the Berlin of 1919: “La città borghese nelle sue estreme e orride metamorfosi rappresenta per l’uomo il luogo in cui egli si ritrova ‘fuori dalla porta’” (*Germania* 117; “The

bourgeois city in its extreme and horrid metamorphosis represents for Man the place where he is ‘left outside the door’”). That is to say, Man is suddenly expelled from that society of “friends,” of free men as rivals, structured both physically and mentally around a communal space, which, according to Jean-Paul Vernant, was at the origin of the Greek concept of the *polis*.

As we saw in the first chapter, it is a tendency profoundly rooted in the Fascist frame-of-mind that of organizing life in a series of closed microcosms, where all communality is lost, and where social relations reveal the presence of strong barriers between oneself and the “others.” As a result, these latter are constantly excluded by the walls of the family, the walls of the factory, and, even more so, by the walls of the city. Nevertheless, the mythologem of the city is, in itself, one of the most powerful and ancient images in the Western tradition; an image that has acquired heavenly or infernal prerogatives depending on the way it has been evoked by artists, philosophers, and intellectuals, such as St. Augustine or Baudelaire. But, no matter how deformed it might appear, the mythologem of the city, just like the mythologem of the Orphan-child, can always regenerate itself and overcome the technicized alterations operated against it. Interestingly enough, drawing on the studies by Altheim and his disciples on the historical and psychological foundations of the city, Furio Jesi has argued that:

Queste ricerche hanno mostrato dietro alla parvenza della città borghese un’immagine intrinsecamente non suscettibile di qualificazioni classiste: un’immagine genuinamente mitica, e dunque profondamente e unicamente umana. [Ecco che] l’“andare sempre a casa” di Novalis si riferisce alla direzione verso il primordiale e l’*umanamente* primordiale che orienta il flusso delle esperienze di chi vive in comunione con il passato giacente in lui, e quindi anche con il mito genuino. (*Germania*, 107; 112)

(These researches have shown behind the façade of the bourgeois city an image intrinsically non-susceptible of classist qualifications: a genuinely

mythical image, and therefore profoundly and uniquely human. [Therefore] Novalis' "always going home" refers to the direction towards the primordial and the *humanly* primordial that orients the flux of experiences of those who live in communion with the past the lies in themselves, and therefore also with the genuine myth).

It is precisely in this sense that *Open City* can be interpreted as an attempt to "go back home": to de-construct the image of Rome erected by Fascist rhetoric and re-found the city on a new, genuinely humanist basis, while questioning some of the most powerful strongholds of Fascist ideology, such as *famiglia* and *patria*, through the mythological prism of the Orphan-child.

As implied in chapter one, one of the main characteristics of the Orphan-child, conceived as a genuine mythologem, is its ability to put into question the closed, fortress-like, concept of "home." *Open City* contends such concept not only through the portrayal of an unconventional family--by Fascist standards--in which a widow with an eight-year-old son is pregnant of another man whom she is about to marry, as many critics have underlined, but also and foremost through the figure of the half-orphan Marcello, whose words and deeds tend to give an estranged image of the real, thus accomplishing, once again, the Deleuzian ideal of "being foreign in one's own language" (*Negotiations* 41), while putting into question well-established and socially accepted interpretations of the real.

The first site of subversion in Marcello's attitude towards the adult world can be identified in the bedtime sequence on the eve of Pina and Francesco's planned wedding. As Francesco puts Marcello to bed, the latter asks him all of a sudden: "Da domani posso chiamarti papa?" ("Starting tomorrow, can I call you dad?"). Like with De Sica's Pricò, this is just a question, as opposed to a Just question, but precisely because of its simplicity, it is all the more powerful in breaking the traditionally encamped boundaries of the Bourgeois

microcosm, while advocating for a more open-ended, non-exclusive, idea of Fatherhood, conceived not so much as a natural given, but as something that can be actually contended. Such a subtly subversive attitude, reappears more explicitly towards the end of the film, when, instead of passively accepting the repressive presence of a Father figure, as in the traditional Bourgeois family, the now-orphaned Marcello actively and consciously decides to “choose” his new father, as the highly symbolic gift of the scarf, at the end of the goodbye sequence between him and Francesco, readily reveals to us.

More in general, the “angelismo eversivo” (37; “subversive angelicism”) identified by De Santi in De Sica’s *The Children Are Watching Us* may well apply also to the narrative and ethical function of the Orphan-child figure portrayed in Rossellini’s *Open City*. In this perspective, one of the most powerful--and less talked about--sequences in the movie is the one in which we see Marcello and his friends appear from behind a hill right after the explosion of a gasoline tank secretly organized by them as an act of revolt against the Nazi occupiers. From the narrative point of view, this act signals a turning point in the plot and will bring the initial situation to a head: attracted by the explosion, the following morning dozens of soldiers surround the tenement hall where Pina and her family live to search for shirkers, as well as for Manfredi (who has also been spotted in the same area the day before), and, in a rapid succession of events, Francesco is arrested and Pina is cruelly shot dead, thus transforming Marcello into a complete orphan.

Ethically speaking, though, what is most remarkable in the abovementioned sequence of the sabotage, is the crystal-image that, in Deleuzian terms, actually superimposes the group of children to the flames and glare of the explosion in the background, fostering in the audience a powerful mental connection between Infancy and Revolt, in which the “actual”

and the “virtual” become indiscernible, while the music significantly underscores even more the relevance of the scene. Ironically enough, the leader of this symbolic act of insurgency against the Fascistized Rome of 1944 is a crippled Orphan-child, named Romoletto, literally “the little Romolus,” a name all too familiar for the audience of the time, after twenty years of Fascist rhetoric around the mythological founding of the Eternal City.

In all of the above mentioned examples, the mythologem of the Orphan-child succeeds in putting into question well-established precepts and interpretations of the real promoted by Fascist camp-thinking in the realm of family, domesticity, and fatherhood, while allowing the adults that surround him--as well as past and present audiences--to think and look at such concepts differently. But the ethically charged and subversive role played by the Orphan-child in *Open City* functions also in relation to the, by then, Fascistized concept of *patria*, conceived as a militarized and encamped Fatherland, as my analysis of the opening and final shots of the movie will now engage in demonstrating.

In his article *Space, Rhetoric, and the Divided City in Roma Città Aperta*, David Forgacs has noted that the opening shot of the movie is almost an exact reverse of the closing one in terms of the city’s topography. The Italian release print, in fact, opens with a leftward pan looking out from Viale Trinità dei Monti, above piazza di Spagna, west over the downtown area. The last shot, on the other hand, is a rightward pan filmed from Monte Mario, on the opposite side of the Tiber, with the boys walking down Via Trionfale, against the backdrop of a panorama that looks east over the city. In both cases, the dome of St. Peter’s Basilica functions as an easily recognizable metonymic symbol for the entire city of Rome. Thus, the two images look almost identical, but they actually differ completely in the way we are supposed to *read* the Deleuzian gap that exists between them.

According to Forcags they simply function as “visual containers” of the story that unfolds between them: “as extreme long shots they are a pair of macroscopic views of the city and they conceal the more microscopic views that the rest of the film reveals. [...] The Rome shown in the film is a city of dwellings, not of monuments” (110-112). This is undoubtedly true: the film does aim at re-appropriating Rome for its ordinary citizens. But what is the function of the panoramic tracking shot that opens the film and how does it relate to last one? My argument is that the first image is not really functional in determining the time and space of the action. In fact, both of these aspects--the time and the space--are already made very clear by the Italian title of the movie: *Roma città aperta*, where “open city,” besides its overtly symbolic meaning, is also the specific military designation given to Rome by the Germans; a designation all too familiar for the Italian audiences of 1945. Thus, what the initial shot really does, together with the pan of the German soldiers traversing Piazza di Spagna as they sing a patriotic song, is to establish, or rather reinforce, a pure “cliché” in the Deleuzian sense of the term: a purely redundant and, by then, Fascistized image of Rome, that Rossellini will attempt to de-construct throughout the rest of the movie.

Interestingly enough, the only other recognizable sight of Rome in the film, apart from the panoramic views of the city and the Spanish Steps, is a clearly Fascist one: the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, completed in the same year of *Open City*, in the EUR quarter of the city. This building, often referred to as the “Squared Coliseum,” is a perfect example of the technicized re-appropriation of the past operated by Fascism.²⁵ What we are dealing with here, is an attempt to offer a mythical and glorious precedent to the dubious

²⁵ As Ben-Ghiat justly writes in her reading of Italian Fascism: “Italy’s formidable cultural patrimony made many fascists acutely aware of the role aesthetic prestige could play in the arrogation of international influence. A regenerated Italian culture would advertise national creative genius throughout the world, much as it had during the Renaissance” (6-7).

accomplishments of Fascist Italy in order to “cast in the past the image of our nation as we conceive it for the future,” as Himmler once said in reference to Nazi Germany.²⁶

Hence, in the Partisan attack against the convoys carrying away Francesco after Pina’s death, the *agalma* of the Colosseo Quadrato acts not only as the distant backdrop of the fighting sequence, but also and foremost, as the main target of the ambush. The camera angle used by Rossellini, in fact, purposely helps to create almost an optical illusion: the impression we, as spectators, receive is that the partisans hiding on the hilltop are actually aiming their rifles at the distant Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. Such an indiscernible exchange between what Deleuze would call an “actual” image and a “virtual” one--in which the virtual becomes actual and vice-versa--allows for new cerebral circuits, new ways of connecting together the two images, by means of an irrational or incommensurable link, which, in the case at hand, transforms the Colosseo Quadrato into a powerful metonymic symbol of the Fascist frame-of-mind, which must be destroyed in order to establish a different, genuinely humanistic, open-ended, non-nationalistic, idea of *civiltà italiana*.

After all, this is precisely what the partisans portrayed in the movie are fighting for. *Open city* is not only a film about the rehabilitation of the Italian people after the shameful

²⁶ In quoting Himmler’s remark, Furio Jesi has noted that: “Il volgersi di un uomo verso la propria infanzia, inteso come tentativo di valorizzare mediante il mito il passato, pur senza trasformarlo in eterno presente, ha avuto un equivalente nell’atteggiamento di coloro che si sono eretti a rappresentanti di un popolo e si sono preoccupati di evocarne l’infanzia, aprendo ad un mito non genuino—perché deliberatamente evocato e ‘personalizzato’, nazionalizzato—il passato della propria stirpe [alimentato] non da scrupolosa e severa ricostruzione scientifica, bensì dalla volontà di miticizzare la propria ‘infanzia nazionale’” (*Germania* 221; “Turning towards one’s own infancy, in the attempt of enhancing the past through myth, without transforming it in eternal present, has had its equivalent in the attitude of those that, after imposing themselves as representatives of a people, evoked its infancy, thus opening to a non-genuine myth--to the extent that it was deliberately evoked and ‘personalized’, nationalized--the past of their ancestors, [fostered] not by a serious and rigorous scientific approach, but by the will to mythicize their ‘national infancy’”).

pages of Fascism, as some critics have argued in the past. It is above all a film that attempts to rehabilitate the Human as such, without any further connotation: Manfredi, Francesco, Pina, Don Pietro, as well as Marcello and his friends, are not fighting in the name of the Italian Nation-State, nor for the specific freedom of a social class, but, as Francesco points out to Pina, they are simply fighting for “un mondo migliore” (“a better world”), a world in which “la Primavera” (“Springtime”), conceivable here as an awakening in/to an open-ended community, will replace the state of sleepiness of the long “Inverno” (“Winter”), brought about by twenty years of totalitarianism and wars. The mythological overtone of Francesco’s speech is obvious, but what we are dealing with here, once again, is not a Just image (a closed elaboration of the real, based on some well-established precept), but just an image (an open-ended interpretation of the real), which makes it all the more powerful in fighting against the Fascist frame-of-mind, as well as every other form of camp-thinking. More specifically, Rossellini is attempting to move away from the overtly “technicized” Springtime of many ideologically-charged speeches, songs and hymns of the time--from the Fascist hymn *Giovinetta* to the Communist song *Fischia il vento*--and to embrace a more open-ended, inclusive (and thus, genuine) use of the Springtime trope, whose function in *Open City* somewhat resembles that of the Orphan-child: a powerful symbol of *puissance* and renewal, capable of overturning the strongholds of Fascist camp-thinking.

It is not by chance, therefore, that Italy as such is never mentioned once by Francesco, Manfredi, or Don Pietro. From Rossellini’s perspective, in fact, words such as “Italia” and “patria” appear irremediably tainted by twenty years of Mussolinian rhetoric. The *civiltà italiana* advocated by *Open City* has nothing to do with Bourgeois or Fascist concepts of Nation or Race, conceived as closed, fortified, microcosms, whose safeness and “purity”

must be constantly preserved, from outside and inside enemies alike. The battles and sacrifices portrayed in the film are actually fought and accepted in the name of a genuinely humanist democracy-to-come, to paraphrase Derrida.

Fascist and Nazi officers, on the contrary, are the only ones still obsessed, throughout the film, with the centuries-old fight for supremacy between Nation-States and Races, as Bergmann and the *commissario* of Rome constantly remind us in their words and deeds. At the same time, though, the complexity of the real used as an epistemological means to fight against every camp-thinking attitude appears most evidently in Rossellini's willingness to avoid any clear-cut ethical distinction between the various characters portrayed in the movie on the simple basis of their nationality.

For one thing, not all German-speaking characters have a negative connotation in the film. The character of the Austrian deserter, for instance, although totally irrelevant from a strictly narrative point of view, in the sense that he adds nothing to the main plot, is actually fundamental in shaping the ethical standpoint of the whole movie: his decision to abandon the Nazi army after witnessing the "inferno" of Montecassino openly contradicts the camp-thinking tendency--so typical of Fascist and Nazi rhetoric--to consider the representatives of one side as fully evil and the others as fully good. But the most interesting and surprising move on Rossellini's part to break the vicious circle of Manichean distinctions, is actually the ethically-charged choice of entrusting the movie's deepest reflection on the wrongs of Fascist and Nazi camp-thinking *not* to a partisan fighter--as one would expect--but to a drunken German officer! It is in fact the drunken Hartmann who openly denounces that there is no such thing as a Superior Race and that the Nazi rhetoric surrounding the enemies in

WWII does not differ, in its essence, from the one used by the Germans in WWI against the French.

Last but not least, if seen from an ethical standpoint, even the hinted homosexuality of the two Gestapo officers, Bergman and Ingrid, may acquire a more complex connotation in *Open City*. Instead of establishing a direct parallelism between sexual perversion and political/ethical abjection, as many critics have suggested in the past, Rossellini's reference to homosexuality represents, in my opinion, a purely *ironic* reversal: an attempt to question and overthrow the Fascist and Nazi prescriptive and repressive representations of Manhood and Womanhood. In other words, the fact that the two main representatives of Nazism in *Open City* cannot actually live up to the technicized, dogmatic, and stereotypical ideals of Manhood and Womanhood that the Nazi frame-of-mind was striving to impose all over Europe at the time, can be read as highly parodic. After all, as Jesi puts it: "Anche la parodia può consentire di raggiungere l'innocenza [...] quando l'animo del parodista non sia chiuso nel desiderio di distruzione" (*Germania* 37-39; "Even parody can allow to reach innocence [...] when the parodist's mindset is not trapped in a destructive frenzy").

Now, if we take a brief look at the other side of the conflict, as far as the portrayal of the Italian people is concerned, we must not forget that the two characters responsible for advancing the plot towards its tragic conclusion are actually both Italian. It is, in fact, Marina who openly denounces Manfredi's whereabouts to the Gestapo, thus allowing the Germans to finally get hold of him, and it is the *commissario* of Rome--not Bergman--who manages to discover Manfredi's real identity, thus enabling the Gestapo to formulate the concrete charges that will lead to his arrest. Once again, the nationality of these characters is of the utmost importance, insofar as it forces past and present audiences to abandon any clear-cut

ethical distinction between “us” and “them,” while promoting the actual complexity of Italy and Rome as a powerful antidote to the totalizing single-sided image of *italianità* and *romanità* implemented by Fascist rhetoric.

As a direct consequence of Rossellini’s open-ended ethical attitude, even the overtly positive characters portrayed in the movie are difficult to label or categorize: Pina is betrothed to a communist but she openly acknowledges her faith in God, Don Pietro is a catholic priest allied with the Communists, and chief-partisan Manfredi turns out to be an anarchist who had already fought in the Spanish civil war. Reality is always indeed more complex than any camp-thinking attitude will ever be able to acknowledge or account for. In advocating for a truly *Neo*-realist take on the world, Rossellini is telling us that in order to establish a different, more inclusive, and open-ended concept of *civiltà italiana*, we need first to subvert and overthrow all the simplistic clichés of prescriptive uniformity, as well as the dogmatic identity-forming policies, that have haunted Italy under Fascism.

Now, going back to the initial sequence of the movie, we can point out that even the font used for the title card acquires, in this context, a more symbolic meaning: the white words “CITTÀ APERTA” over-imposed on the black, Fascist-like, characters of “ROMA,” already imply a strong willingness on Rossellini’s part to break away from the dead-myths of Mussolini’s *Urbs* and purge the image of the city--or rather the rhetoric surrounding it--while making new cerebral circuits possible. Hence, the topographical reversal underlined by David Forgacs between the first and the last shot of the movie also entails, in my opinion, a reversal of the myth of Rome as such: an attempt to reconstitute a “genuine” image of the city, to “go back home”--as Novalis would say--while contrasting the richness and

complexity of Neorealist Rome with the *unrealistic* and technicized simplicity of the single-sided image of the city erected by Fascism.

The entire movie might then be considered a successful attempt to move from the initial shot to the last one, *through* the powerful mythologem of the Orphan-child. It is not by chance, in fact, that Marcello is the last of the main characters to be seen in the movie, walking away with the other kids who have witnessed Don Pietro's execution. They are actually the ones to whom the future of Rome is entrusted. Once again, as Furio Jesi wrote in *Letteratura e Mito*, "Nelle grandi svolte della storia della cultura [...] affiora dalle profondità della psiche l'immagine del fanciullo primordiale, dell'orfano. Ad essa sembra che l'animo umano affidi ciecamente le sue speranze, ed essa è sempre arbitra di metamorfosi" (*Letteratura* 13; "In the great turning points of the history of culture [...], the image of the primordial child, the orphan, surfaces from the depths of the psyche. An image to which the human mind blindly commits its own hopes and an image which always appears, in itself, arbiter of metamorphosis"). In other words, the now-orphaned Marcello, walking with his friends down the highly symbolic Via Trionfale, virtually functions here as a new Romulus, the founder of a new Rome.

If the Fascist youth association of the Figli della Lupa (Children of the She-Wolf) represents a very dangerous technicization--to use Károly Kerényi's expression--of the myth of Romulus and Remus, aimed at reproducing over and over again the same closed reality, Rossellini's use of the Orphan-child mythologem allows, on the contrary, a more genuine approach to myth, that is, an *open-ended* elaboration of the real, finally capable of questioning the clichés and "dead myths" perpetuated by Fascism and Nazism, while inaugurating a new experience of time and a new relationship with the past. After all, as

German director Syberberg used to repeat, in the words of Deleuze: “if Hitler is to be put on trial by cinema, it must be inside cinema, against Hitler the film-maker” (264). *Mutatis mutandis*, Mussolini’s rhetorical use of Rome in Fascist propaganda could only be overturned by establishing an equally powerful counter-myth of Rome, such as the one masterfully concocted by Rossellini, so as to preserve and entrust to future generations a completely different image of the Eternal City. Hence, the ending panoramic view of the city can be read as a complete rebuttal of the opening one, insofar as it comes at the conclusion of a *neo-realist* cinematic experience aimed at overthrowing the Fascist representation of Rome, still rooted in the mindset of the Italian audience of the time.

To conclude, if Rome itself is, to use Millicent Marcus’ insightful definition, the true protagonist of *Open city* (46), then the entire movie might be interpreted as a courageous attempt to purge its *agalma* from twenty years of Fascist rhetoric and offer past and present audiences the possibility of “going back home” to a newly founded city, as the powerful symbol of renewal of the Orphan-child that closes the film aptly suggests. By visually opposing the last shot to the first one, Rossellini signals his own willingness to replace, through the genuine mythologem of the Orphan-child, the closed-ness and falsely unilateral representation of Fascist Rome, with the open-endedness and complexity of Neorealist Rome. As Jesi once wrote: “La città non è un luogo del perenne essere ‘fuori dalla porta’. Se si dirà ‘NO’, anch’essa tornerà ad essere la serena immagine mitica della vita collettiva in cui si fonda la personalità individuale [in quanto] l’accesso al mito, compiuto con purezza di cuore e consapevolezza, è sempre un ritorno all’umano”. (*Germania*, 116; 86; “the city is not the place of a perennial being ‘outside the door’. If we learn to say ‘NO’, it will become once again the serene mythical image of collective life, on which individual personality is founded

[insofar as] accessing myth, with purity of heart and consciousness, is always a return to Man”).

De Sica's *Miracle in Milan*: A Revolutionary Ophan-Child

In analyzing the internal and external functioning of every symbol of power as such, Furio Jesi has acutely noted that one of the most disquieting achievements of capitalist Bourgeoisie has been its ability to grant a *symbolic* value of powerfulness to its own structures. As a direct consequence, even if one recognizes that certain symbols of power pertain specifically to the opponents' frame-of-mind, “[...] si subisce la tentazione di credere che quei simboli siano comunque, in oggettività non contingente, simboli di forza, e quindi che sia necessario impadronirsene per vincere la battaglia” (*Spartakus*; “[...] it is tempting to think that those same symbols are, in non-contingent objectivity, symbols of powerfulness, and that one needs therefore to seize them in order to win the battle”). Hence, the actual goal should be to “de-mythologize” the opponents' symbols of power, that is, “liberare gli sfruttati dal potere fascinatorio di miti peculiari degli sfruttatori, i quali sono, sì, falsi miti, miti non genuini, [...] ma esercitano il pericoloso potere dei simboli efficaci” (*Spartakus* 38; “free the exploited from the fascination towards specific myths owned by the exploiters, which are, indeed, false myths, non genuine myths, [...] but they exert the dangerous appeal of being effective symbols”).

Now, by putting into question precisely the technicized myths of powerfulness and revolution, championed by extreme right-wing and left-wing ideologies alike, De Sica's 1951 movie, *Miracle in Milan*, represents a very successful attempt to give an estranged and open-ended image of the real, in a time in which the opposed forces of the Cold War were becoming more and more encamped. One way to achieve this much-needed “de-

mythologization” of the opponents’ ideology, on De Sica’s part, is to put at the center of the political and ethical revolt portrayed in the film an Orphan-child figure, which, as we have seen in chapter one, can function as a profoundly liminal and subversive presence, capable of shattering all sorts of encamped interpretations of the real. In other words, the main character, Totò, will appear as a genuinely revolutionary figure precisely because he does *not* embody the traditional symbols of power, nor does he rely, as we will see, on well-established precepts and ways of looking at the world to bring about his revolt.

Based on Zavattini’s 1943 novel *Totò il buono*, the film, which was co-written by De Sica himself, portrays the cheerful, open-ended and genuine upheaval of an entire community of homeless people, who, led by the truly revolutionary Orphan-child figure of Totò, succeed in setting up, in the outskirts of Milan, a cheerful and alternative shantytown, a *polis* within the *polis*, where the human mind, as stated by De Santi, “conia il meraviglioso e può guadagnare altri spazi, se mossa da un impulso naturale. [È] una fantasia vivente che insorge dal nodo della realtà a segno di districarla dagli involucri che la contengono e la limitano” (32; “coins wonders and is capable of winning new spaces, if prompted by a natural impulse. [It’s] a living fantasy that arises from the skein of reality in order to disentangle it from the wrappings that restrain and limit it”). But the moment the shantytown’s stretch of land turns out to be an oilfield, the reality principle bites back: the community is betrayed by one of its members and, despite the reassurances to the contrary, is eventually forced to leave the now-profitable terrain and fly away on magical brooms in search of a new land in which, as the end card reads, “buongiorno vuol dire davvero buongiorno” (“good morning really means good morning”).

In a way, being a full-blow Orphan-child figure right from the start, the protagonist of De Sica's 1951 film perfectly incarnates the double-sided nature of crisis and renewal identified by Kerényi and Jesi with this powerful mythologem. Also, if we expand on Giorgio Agamben's reading of Infancy and interpret every Orphan-child as such as *the* "unstable signifier" par excellence, capable of threatening with its open-endedness every closed and falsely serene microcosm, then the ethical function of Totò might actually be that of pointing towards new ways of experiencing--and experimenting with--reality, which, as we have seen in chapter one, can be conceived as one of the main contributions of Italian Neorealism in the advancement of a non-Fascist way of thinking.

In this perspective, although the film has been oftentimes accused of betraying the principles and ideals of Italian Neorealism, the most acute critics of the time saw no actual contradiction between the fable-like approach of the film and the Neorealist experience as such. The Italian critic Renzo Renzi, for instance, wrote in his 1951 review of the film that De Sica's endeavor "apre nuove porte alla nostra immaginazione; suggerisce nuovi modi più liberi per alimentarla. Il neorealismo con *Miracolo a Milano* allarga il proprio orizzonte espressivo" ("opens new doors to our imagination; suggests new and freer ways to feed it. Neorealism with *Miracle in Milan* widens its expressive horizon"). Along the same lines, Gabriel García Márquez justly noted that the film's great merit was its ability to: "rendere umana la fantasia, far passare la favola attraverso il filtro del crudo realismo italiano" (64; "humanize fantasy, filter the fairytale approach through Italian crude realism"). And Zavattini himself proudly underlined that "nel nostro film tutto, anche se fabulistico, racchiude la realtà. E quando dico favola voglio dire non esagerazione della realtà, ma semplificazione della realtà" (43; "in our movie, everything, even if fable-like, contains

reality. And when I say fable, I do not mean an exaggeration of reality, but a simplification of reality”). In a way, even the dove that punctuates the plot as a magical *deus-ex-machina*, capable each time of solving the situation when everything seems lost, is nothing more than the actual power to materialize the poetic frame-of-mind of all the discarded people, as André Bazin insightfully saw.

Now, if we start analyzing the movie in depth, we can notice that, perhaps, it is not by chance that, when we first see Totò leaving the orphanage where he grew up, he is dressed exactly like Pricò in the ending sequence of *The Children Are Watching Us*. A subtle connection seems to exist between the two movies in question, not only in the assonance of the two protagonists’ names, but also and foremost in their ethical function: Totò, might well be considered as a grown-up version of Pricò, to the extent that they are both genuine symbols of conscious revolt against the fortified, encamped, reality that surrounds them, be it the falsely serene microcosm of a petit-bourgeois family, or the falsely wealthy macrocosm of a large industrial city.²⁷ In both cases, the powerful mythologem of the Orphan-child opens up every camp-thinking attitude in order to foster a new way of experiencing and experimenting with reality, that is, an actual neo-realism: a *new* way of looking at the world.

As noted by Gualtiero De Santi, throughout the film “Il lampo di verità scatta dall’accostamento di due tratti differenti: quello realistico e quello fantastico” (28; “the flash of truthfulness is achieved by the juxtaposition of two different traits: the realistic and the fantastic”). The first example of such juxtaposition can be found in the milk sequence right at the beginning of the movie, when Lolotta returns home from grocery shopping only to find

²⁷ Also, we must not forget that when Zavattini was working on the script of *The Children Are Watching Us*, he had already started writing the novel *Totò il buono*, which would eventually turn into *Miracle in Milan*.

Totò staring mesmerized at an overflowing pot of boiling milk that is trickling down the stove and across the floor. Instead of scolding him, like any respectable Bourgeois mother would do, Lolotta turns the realistic messiness of the incident into a playful, poetic and uncanny event, in which the trickle of milk suddenly becomes the river of an imaginary landscape, while the implied vastness of the Earth can be bridged with a simple jump back and forth. Here again, the actual and the virtual become indiscernible from one another, like in a Deleuzian crystal-image, thus transforming the whole sequence into a powerfully instructive epiphany--for both Totò and the audience--on the intrinsic open-endedness of the real. Irrational as it may seem, insofar as it adds nothing to the main plot and has no apparent cause-effect link with the rest of the film, this sequence is actually fundamental in establishing right away the ethical standpoint of the film, by forcing the audience to look at reality differently.

Analogously, once Lolotta passes away and Totò is forced to leave the hut, the sequence in which the little Orphan-child follows the funeral carriage around the city of Milan is entirely played by De Sica on a series of bold visual-audio contrasts or, to use Deleuze's expression, on powerful "disjunction[s] of the sound and the visual" (*Cinema 2* 267), capable of rendering the actual complexity of the real, while shattering the clichés traditionally associated with such scenes. The happy, mindless and catchy tune projected at full volume by the car-top loudspeakers to advertise a shoe brand is, in fact, in total contrast with the *agalma* of the hearse, insofar as it does not fit the pathos of the situation, but it creates instead an uncanny and incommensurable "gap", underlined even more by the shoes slogan "Camminate felici" ("Walk Happy"), which is the exact opposite of what Totò is experiencing.

Moreover, the arrival of a total stranger who joins Totò behind the funeral carriage and pretends to cry at his side just to hide from the two policemen that are after him and then runs away as soon as it's safe for him to do so, without exchanging a single word with Totò, creates another incommensurable "gap" in the plot, as well as adding a note of anti-clichés complexity to the entire sequence. Once again, groundless and absurd as they may seem at first, these are *not* simple diversions, concocted by De Sica and Zavattini to better entertain the audience. On the contrary, they can be interpreted as Deleuzian time-images, insofar as the "cuts" in question are entirely functional in offering an open-ended interpretation of the real, in which tragedy and comedy are not reassuringly separated from each other, like it often happens in Hollywood films, but are actually mingled together with no clear-cut distinction. Moreover, instead of hindering the open-ended, fantasy-driven and subtly subversive take on the world typically associated with the genuine Orphan-child mythologem, De Sica and Zavattini show us how Lolotta actually cherished and encouraged right from the beginning Totò's intrinsic liminality and Otherness, thus making it her most important and long-lasting legacy to him.

Consequently, the moment Totò turns eighteen and enters the real world, he will bring to it his pure and liminal gaze, typical of the Orphan-child mythologem as such, thus realizing, yet again, the Deleuzian ideal of "being foreign in one's own language" (*Negotiations* 41). When he runs into a group of road workers, for instance, he spontaneously decides to help them lift a railway track without expecting anything in exchange, just like later he will give away his bag to the tramp that tried to steal it from him simply because he realizes how much the man actually likes it or he will start playing peekaboo with a little girl only to make her smile and help her get warm by running around. In all three examples,

Totò's actions are dictated not by personal gain, but by a truly genuine interest in the Other, to the extent that even a quintessentially banal greeting like "buon giorno" ("good morning") can acquire in the film a profoundly revolutionary and almost uncanny connotation, if willfully addressed to a total stranger in the middle of the street, in a large industrial city like Milan.

Just like the hearse followed by the Orphan-child acted as an unsettling foreign body in the urban fabric of the city--as highlighted by De Sica's use of long shots--compelling both the hectic traffic and the escapist music to stop on its passage, the now grown-up Totò will continue throughout the film to act as a "disturbance" and literally disrupt every camp-thinking attitude as such, while opening up reality to new possibilities.²⁸ After all, as noted by Gualtiero De Santi in his analysis, the movie "affida al sogno il compito di sconfiggere la realtà e al personaggio di Totò una carica demiurgica a mezzo tra l'umano e il divino" (32; "entrusts to dreams the task of defeating reality and to Totò's character a demiurgic drive that is half-human, half-divine"), which is exactly the main function of the Orphan-child mythologem, always suspended between two worlds with its peculiar ability to look at things from a different perspective.

Hence, Gabriel García Márquez is certainly right when he adds in his analysis that *Miracle in Milan*: "è quasi letteralmente un film muto, in cui sono state sfruttate tutte le possibilità espressive dell'immagine" (65; "is almost literally a silent film, in which all the expressive potentialities of the image have been deployed"). Such importance attributed to the *agalma*--the image--capable of mixing the "actual" with the "virtual," just like in the

²⁸ Interestingly enough, the original title for the film should have been, in Zavattini's intentions, *I poveri disturbano*, *The Poor Are a Disturbance*. Deemed to be too overly polemical, it was later changed to *Miracolo a Milano*.

Deleuzian crystal-image, is very much evident in the picture chosen by De Sica and Zavattini for the title card of the movie: the famous 1559 painting by Peter Breughel the Elder, entitled *Netherlandish Proverbs*, which depicts a world entirely populated with literal renditions of over a hundred Flemish proverbs of the epoch. At first it may seem just a lively, chaotic and over-crowded village scene, typical of certain Flemish art of the time, but at a closer look, we realize that it is, in fact, a topsy-turvy world, full of apparent absurdities, irrational or incommensurable “gaps,” that, just like in the Deleuzian time-image, allow for new cerebral circuits, by rendering indiscernible the actual from the virtual, and vice-versa. In this perspective, the kind of shantytown depicted by De Sica is indeed a sort of big Brueghelian village that allows the audience to look at reality differently, insofar as the plot is actually full of gags and paradoxical situations that end up overthrowing inherited and commonsensical conceptions of the world.²⁹

Analogously, the change in the setting from Zavattini’s imaginary city of Bamba in *Totò il buono*, to De Sica’s real-life, albeit estranged, economic center of post-war Italy in *Miracle in Milan*, corresponds to this same need to experience--and experiment with--reality differently. As Claude Roy noted in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1951: “Un’allegoria è commovente e significativa nella misura in cui, precisamente, la finzione vi si confronta con la realtà. Se le scope si alzano in volo nel Regno di Cuccagna, è una fiaba. Se le scope si alzano in volo a Milano, è un modo per capire un po’ meglio Milano, i milanesi, gli uomini” (37; “An allegory is touching and significant to the extent that the fictional mode actually

²⁹ As noted by Corrado Maltese in his article *Brueghel e De Sica*, “evidentemente, gli autori del film hanno voluto rifarsi a una tradizione particolare dell’arte realistica secondo la quale la più scrupolosa aderenza alla realtà si può attuare assieme a una forte trasfigurazione fantastica” (63; “evidently, the film authors wanted here to draw on a specific tradition of realistic art, according to which the most scrupulous adherence to reality can coexist with a strong fantastic transfiguration”).

confronts itself with reality. If the brooms fly away in the Land of Cockaigne, it is a fable. If the brooms fly away in Milan, it is a way to better understand Milan itself, the Milanese people, and mankind as a whole”).³⁰

In a way, *Miracle in Milan* can be considered as De Sica’s version of *Open City*, insofar as it represents an attempt, on his part, to de-construct the stereotypical and encamped *agalma* of Milan as the economic and industrial center of Italy, while re-founding the entire city on a more genuine basis, by opening it to the *puissance* of renewal traditionally associated with the mythologem of the Orphan-child. If read along these lines, it is not by chance that Mobby’s headquarters are closely reminiscent of Fascist architecture, in its degraded mixture of technicized neoclassical references and contemporary flair, even though the film is presumably set in the 1950s. Once again, as stated by Deleuze, “if Hitler is to be put on trial by cinema, it must be inside cinema, against Hitler the film-maker” (264) and what De Sica’s portrayal of Milan seems to imply here is that the Democratic Bourgeoisie of postwar Italy is disquietingly similar to the Fascist Bourgeoisie of prewar Italy. Interestingly enough, though, both in Rossellini and in De Sica, the future of the symbolic nerve centers of Italy--Rome and Milan--is entrusted to an Orphan-child figure: Marcello in the one case, Totò in the other.

At the core of the De Sica’s Milanese “miracle”, is the intuition that--as Manuel De Sica puts it--“dentro la realtà potesse scoppiare un’evenienza poetica e miracolosa che infine

³⁰ In *Spartakus*, Jesi gives yet another illuminating example on how a powerful allegory can derive from the clash between reality and fiction: “[...] nell’ideare un cartello di propaganda sindacale, composto dalla figura del padrone che opprime dall’alto le figure dei lavoratori, si è rivelato più efficace l’uso di un disegno di Grosz (un grasso ‘padrone’ per eccellenza) con la fotografia sovrapposta del volto di un padrone noto a tutti, anziché l’intera—e pur suggestiva—fotografia del medesimo padrone colto in atteggiamento ‘sovrano’ al suo tavolo. Il disegno di Grosz conferisce infatti la dimensione simbolica all’immagine propagandistica, e il volto fotografato sovrapposto determina la coincidenza fra simbolo ed esperienza quotidiana” (*Spartakus* 51).

cancellasse ogni limite precedente” (23; “within the real could explode a poetic and miraculous occurrence capable of erasing in the end every preexisting limit”). And this is exactly what happens in the course of the film, thanks to the powerful double-sided figure of crisis and renewal represented by the mythologem of the Orphan-child, whose ethical function is precisely that of putting into question all sorts of well-established clichés through subtly subversive attitudes and gestures, while disrupting the very symbols of power traditionally associated with Bourgeois conceptions of authority and leadership. A simple whistle in the hands and imaginative mindset of Totò becomes unexpectedly the means to stop a violent argument between two tramps, one of whom is encouraged by him to blow in it, so as to channel his anger elsewhere and settle the question in a non-violent way. Along the same lines, Totò’s simple suggestion to sing a random happy tune will prevent Arturo from committing suicide on the railway tracks, whereas the apparently irrational act of pouring an entire bucket of water over himself will prevent Edvige from being punished by her mistress for having inadvertently sprinkled him in the first place. More importantly, even when Totò pretends to be crippled with the cripple, stunted with the midget, and squinting with the squinter, there is no mocking whatsoever in his attitude. On the contrary, there is only a genuine interest and a profound ability to look at reality from a different perspective, by truly acknowledging and accepting the Other as “as possible world” (*Michel* 306), to use Deleuze’s insightful definition.

Through Totò’s subtly subversive--if not overly revolutionary--gaze and mindset, everyday reality is seen differently, which functions per se as a powerful wake-up call for past and present audiences. As stated by De Santi, “le cose naturali torcono la loro immediatezza” (28; “natural things wring their immediacy”) and end up giving an estranged

representation of the real, in which the Orphan child's perspective is actually able to defamiliarize the most banal and outworn clichés. A city's topography, for instance, can acquire new connotations, if a simple street name actually becomes a means to teach math problems to uneducated children, whereas a small roasted chicken can turn into the highly sought-after prize of an improvised lottery and a couple of stones together with a loaf of bread can prevent an undernourished old man to be lifted in the air by a handful of balloons.

What all the above mentioned examples have in common is that they allow an unclosed interpretation of the real, which is, in my view, one of the main traits of the Italian Neorealist experience as a whole. Moreover, this open-ended approach to the external world implies also, from a hermeneutical point of view, a much-needed problematization of the traditional distinction between fictional mode and realist mode. In this sense, what Lucia Re writes in reference to Calvino's 1947 novel *The Path to The Spiders' Nests* may well apply also to De Sica's 1951 *Miracle in Milan* insofar as, in both works, the fantasizing attitude of the protagonist "gestures broadly in the direction of a different relation between the ego and reality [...] a significant form of resistance to social as well as psychic repression" (294-7), capable of undermining the very symbols of power traditionally deployed in the context of a war (like in Calvino), or in the midst of a collective upheaval (like in De Sica).

For one thing, Totò's physical appearance is willfully opposed to that of the traditionally tall, handsome, muscular, and awe-inspiring hero cliché, whose false powerfulness is here completely overthrown. Moreover, as justly noted by Furio Jesi in *Letteratura e mito*, "la forza misteriosa che soccorre l'orfano primordiale, l'oscura benevolenza che la natura gli mostra nell'ora stessa in cui gli svela il suo volto più minaccioso, la Potenza del fanciullo, quale arbitro di metamorfosi, hanno tutte una radice di

gioia” (*Letteratura* 12; “the mysterious force that rescues the primordial orphan, the obscure benevolence that nature shows towards him right when it reveals him its most menacing aspects, the Powerfulness of the child, as arbiter of metamorphosis, all share the same forbear in joyfulness”). And joyfulness is indeed what best characterizes Totò’s way of leading the shantytown construction process, which culminates with Alessandro Cicognini’s famous theme song “Ci basta una capanna” (“All we need’s a shack”), triumphantly sung by the entire tramp community as they march down the streets of their newly founded city, on the day of the official inauguration. Thanks to the joyful and transformative intervention of the Orphan-child protagonist, what was previously only a scattered group of provisional shelters in the middle of a wasteland, becomes now a genuinely inclusive, welcoming, and open-ended *polis*.

But joyfulness as such is portrayed within the movie also as a truly revolutionary force, capable of disrupting more and more--in all sorts of comic ways--the violence deployed by Mobbi and his guards to drive the tramps out of the shantytown. In other words, it represents the “secret weapon,” so to speak, at the basis of all of Totò’s creative solutions, devised--with the dove’s aid--to contrast the police interventions and attacks: from literally blowing away the tear gas smoke that has invaded the shantytown, to conjuring up umbrellas in order to take shelter from the water jets; from transforming the officers’ attack orders into operatic virtuoso feats, to having the entire squad end their charge on a comically slippery ice surface, not to mention the famous ending sequence of the flying brooms that free Totò and his friends once and for all from Mobbi’s abuses.³¹

³¹ We might note here that In *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Calvino acutely defines “la ricerca della leggerezza come reazione al peso di vivere [...] Alla precarietà dell’esistenza della tribù—siccità, malattie, influssi maligni—lo sciamano rispondeva annullando il peso del suo corpo,

Moreover, if rhetoric is portrayed throughout the film as a technicized art, geared to hide the truth and deceive the simple-minded, while favoring the interests of the dominant group--like in Mobby's falsely inclusive use of the tautological statement "un naso è un naso" ("a nose is a nose")--then, it cannot be surprising that one of the most powerful sequences in the film is the one in which the two Bourgeois businessmen, Bramba e Mobbi, argue more and more vehemently over the price of the shantytown's land, thus revealing their real nature, hidden behind their falsely accommodating words and deeds. It is, in fact, the perfect exemplification of what Deleuze calls a crystal image, that is, an image in which the "actual" and the "virtual" become indiscernible from one another, to the extent that, in the case at hand, the arguing turns literally into barking and then back again into arguing, thus allowing the insurgence, in both the internal and external audience, of new cerebral circuits that tend to abolish any real distinction between the greediness of men and the ravenousness of dogs.³²

trasportandosi in volo in un altro mondo, in un altro livello di percezione, dove poteva trovare le forze per modificare la realtà. In secoli e civiltà più vicini a noi nei villaggi dove la donna sopportava il peso più grave d'una vita di costrizioni, le streghe volavano di notte sui manici delle scope. [...] Credo che sia una costante antropologica questo nesso tra levitazione desiderata e privazione sofferta" (33; "Faced with the precarious existence of tribal life—drought, sickness, evil influences—the shaman responded by ridding his body of weight and flying to another world, another level of perception, where he could find the strength to change the face of reality. In centuries and civilizations closer to us, in villages where the women bore most of the weight of a constricted life, witches flew by night on broomsticks [...]. I find it a steady feature in anthropology, this link between the levitation desired and the privation actually suffered" 27).

³² Analogously, De Sica's masterful use of the shot-reverse-shot technique in the passing train sequence, earlier on in the film, in which someone opens a window and spitefully throws an empty bottle at the tramps, creates a powerfully uncanny contrast between the mincing and snotty Bourgeois on the train and the ragged tramps that stare at them beside the railway tracks as if they were strange animals in a zoo.

At the same time, though, this is *not* an ideologically aligned work of art that sides for one specific political party over another. Egotism and selfishness can spring up everywhere, even amongst the tramps, like in the case of Rabbi, whose punishment for betraying the entire community will be nonetheless playful and joyful, insofar as it involves simply the magical multiplication, on Totò's part, of the very same top hat that triggered Rappi's resentful envy in the first place. According to Silvia Cirillo, what we are dealing with here is actually a "spazio utopico di una cultura popolare, accentuatamente pre-ideologica, da difendere dalle aggressioni dell'inquinamento conformistico e borghese" (44; "utopian space of a popular culture, willfully pre-ideological, that must be defended from the attacks of Bourgeois and conformist pollution").

What De Sica and Zavattini seem to advocate for in their controversial 1951 movie is an inclusive and open-ended interpretation of society, far removed from any camp-thinking attitude, as well as from any idealized depiction of the Marxian proletariat. At the beginning of the movie, for instance, Totò spontaneously applauds the rich Bourgeois leaving the theater La Scala because he genuinely appreciates their elegance and beauty without any class-solidarity preconceptions and without passing any sort of class-war judgments on them, just like the tramp steals Totò's bag not because he is interested in appropriating the content, but simply because he likes the bag itself. Then, later on in the movie, Totò will be more than willing to grant all sorts of material wishes to his fellow citizens: fur coats, a radio, tails, a wardrobe, a chandelier, a fancy sofa, expensive wrist watches, etc... But, as Silvia Cirillo goes on to specify in her analysis, these material goods often become simple playthings, "giocattoli strani" (41; "weird toys"), in the hands of Totò's community, thus fully

overthrowing the false status of non-contingent powerfulness granted by capitalist Bourgeoisie to such commodities.

To conclude, if it's true that, in De Sica's own words, the film is "una fantasia grottesca che, nonostante le esagerazioni comiche, rivela il dramma dei poveri che vivono e lavorano senza alcun aiuto, alieni tra le vite degli altri uomini" (4; "a grotesque fantasy that, despite the comic exaggeration, reveals the drama of the poor who live and work without help, aliens in the midst of other men's lives"), then the entire film can be interpreted as a "exercise in strategic universalism" (77), to use Paul Gilroy's expression: a truly revolutionary frame-of-mind, that goes willfully beyond any camp-thinking attitude linked to specific political parties and ideologies. The great powerfulness of *Miracle in Milan* is that, in the end, Totò and his friends do not fly away to a Kingdom lost in the fogs of Utopia, nor to a place of encamped political Isms, as one may expect at first, but simply to a Land "dove buon giorno vuol dire davvero buon giorno" ("where good morning really means good morning"). After all, to genuinely greet the Other's presence in our lives is a way to "re-cognize" the intrinsic *puissance* always already embedded in the Other as "a possible world" (Deleuze *Michel* 306). In and of itself, this is not a Just idea, based on some ideologically closed interpretation of the real. It is, on the contrary, just an idea: a simple reversal in our attitude towards the Other, a new open-ended way of looking at the Other, which, to me, is the core value of the Italian Neorealist experience as such. Hence, the ending title card juxtaposed to the *agalma* of the flying brooms can indeed be considered as the film's most powerful legacy for past and present audiences, insofar as it calls into action each and every one of us, in our everyday interactions with the Other, while disrupting the very concept of a

falsely reassuring, Hollywood-style, happy ending. As Calvino once wrote in his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*:

Nei momenti in cui il regno umano mi sembra condannato alla pesantezza, penso che dovrei volare [...] in un altro spazio. Non sto parlando di fughe nel sogno o nell'irrazionale. Voglio dire che devo cambiare il mio approccio, devo guardare il mondo con un'altra ottica, un'altra logica, altri metodi di conoscenza e di verifica. Le immagini di leggerezza che io cerco non devono lasciarsi dissolvere come sogni dalla realtà del presente e del futuro... (635)
Whenever humanity seems condemned to heaviness, I think I should fly [...] into a different space. I don't mean escape into dreams or into the irrational. I mean that I have to change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification. The images of lightness that I seek should not fade away like dreams dissolved by the realities of present and future...(7)

CHAPTER 3

The Mythologem of the Orphan-child in Italian Neorealist Novels

As noted by Peter Bondanella in his seminal work *Italian Cinema From Neorealism to the Present*, English-speaking audiences might be more familiar with the masterpieces of postwar Italian cinema, but we must not overlook the fact that “[...] ‘neorealism’ is a term which has come to characterize not only a given moment in cinematic history, but also a significant trend in Italian literature of the same period” (25). Interestingly enough, the “visionary” aspect of Italian Neorealist cinema, analyzed by Deleuze in *Negotiations* and in his two cinema books, may also apply, in my opinion, to Italian Neorealist novels. Here as well, in fact, the “agent” seems to have been replaced oftentimes by the “seer,” while the character has gained in an ability to see what he has lost in action or reaction. More in general, it is my conviction that the five characteristics identified by Deleuze in Italian Neorealist cinema might be fruitfully extended to Italian Neorealist literature as well. After all, the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of clichés, the condemnation of the plot are not exclusive of the cinematic medium per se.

This third chapter thus focuses on three well-known Italian novels of the 1940s in which the reoccurrence of the Orphan-child mythologem appears to be particularly relevant in disrupting or opening up to new possibilities the way we look at the world: Alberto Moravia’s *Agostino* (1944), Italo Calvino’s *The Path to The Spiders’ Nests* (1947), and Cesare Pavese’s *The House on the Hill* (1949). Fortunately, all three exist in English translation, thus making them more readily accessible to an English-speaking readership.

Once again, this dissertation cannot aim at being exhaustive, but these three works appear to be specifically relevant to the thesis and arguments that my study wants to address and engage with. At the same time, the analytic approach followed throughout this chapter might very well turn out to be equally fruitful, if applied to other literary outcomes of what I have defined as the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s.

Moravia's *Agostino*: The Twofold Liminality of an Orphan-Child

As stated by Lucia Re in *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism*, one of the crucial and (potentially) revolutionary discoveries of psychoanalysis is that sexuality and difference are not given in nature but historically produced by a given culture (278). Hence, the fundamental issue of human alienation, so intrinsically connected to the Bourgeois microcosm analyzed by Jesi in *Germania segreta*, cannot be addressed without interrogating the actual *origins* of alienation itself in the process of the child's emergence into subjectivity. This is especially true if we follow Jesi and interpret infancy as “sede d'elezione di sorgenti di miti genuini” (29 *Germania*; “birthplace par excellence of genuine myths”), capable per se of unmasking and overcoming many of the technicized and alienating clichés perpetuated by the Bourgeois--and Fascist--conceptions of family and sexuality.

As a quintessentially “liminal” figure, the Orphan-child has the potential to disrupt, if genuinely conceived, all sorts of socially imposed repressive boundaries and to denounce the intrinsic limits of every camp-thinking attitude, both *inside* and *outside* of the Bourgeois microcosm, precisely because he does not belong to any stable and/or readily available order of representation. Of course, as Paul Gilroy acutely reminds us, “occupying a space between camps means also that there is the danger of encountering hostility from both sides” (84) And this is precisely what the young protagonist of Alberto Moravia's 1944 novel, *Agostino*, will

end up learning at his own expenses, insofar as he is destined to “[perdere] la sua prima condizione senza per questo essere riuscito ad acquistarne un’altra” (98; “[lose] his first estate without having succeeded in winning another one” 87), as the third-person narrator repeatedly underlines throughout the novel.³³

Written in 1942, but first published in a limited edition only in 1944, after being deeply hindered by the Fascist censorship of the time because of its supposedly scandalous content, the novel brought about a much-needed epistemological break, finally tearing down the wall of hypocrisy erected by Fascist propaganda around sexual taboos, while allowing past and present readers to experience the world of sexuality differently. Just like in De Sica’s *The Children Are Watching Us*, here everything is seen through the perspective of the young protagonist, a father-orphaned thirteen-year-old, caught in the crossfire between equally “closed” interpretations of the real, but capable of shedding light from within on the cracks that appear in *both* microcosms—the Bourgeoisie and the lower social classes—he happens to traverse in the course of the novel, thus validating the potentially revolutionary ethical standpoint of the “liminal” Orphan-child mythologem. In this sense, what Garritano has written in reference to De Sica’s movie, may well apply to Moravia’s novel too:

Gli occhi del bambino [...] seguono i fatti salienti del racconto, [...] scrutano e giudicano il comportamento degli adulti e quasi ‘pedinano’, in termini zavattiniani, i gesti dei grandi, in particolare quei gesti tipici legati all’amore e alla sessualità che si presentano al bambino come un universo misterioso che progressivamente si svela una realtà di inganni e sofferenze. (*L’infanzia* 58; The child’s gaze [...] follows the main turns in the plot, [...] pries into and judges the adults’ behavior, and almost ‘tails’, in the Zavattinian sense of the term, the gestures of grownups, specifically those connected to love and

³³ Page references are to the Bompiani edition (Milano: Bompiani, 2000) for the original Italian version and to the Farrar Straus edition (New York: Farrar Straus, 1950) for the English translation.

sexuality, which appear to the child as a mysterious universe, that will in turn reveal itself as a reality made of deceptions and suffering”).

Mutatis mutandis, the subjective and semi-subjective use of the camera in De Sica, as well as his deployment of irrational and/or incommensurable cuts that have no apparent cause-effect link with the main plot, but are fundamental in portraying and assessing the ethical standpoint of the film, are achieved in Moravia’s novel by blurring the subject’s first-person experiences with a grammatically third-person narrative perspective, which can be considered here as the literary equivalent of a Deleuzian time-image: a mental link--rather than an action-driven one--which makes new cerebral circuits possible, insofar as it forces the readers to constantly question the connections that exist between the different “voices” of the novel: author, narrator, protagonist. In other words, despite the third person narrative, the actual narrator’s--as well as the reader’s--implicit knowledge in regards to sexual matters is willfully put aside throughout the novel in order to achieve a powerful de-familiarizing effect, that ultimately functions as a wake-up call for past and present readerships from the technicized clichés and taboos erected around sexuality.

Now, as far as the plot is concerned, a summer spent in the rich seaside area of the Tuscan coast is the backdrop to the painful coming-of-age of Agostino, who is forced to experience the shock of finding out first that he is not at the center of his mother’s universe and then, once the group of street urchins he joins out of sheer spite open-up his eyes to sexual matters, that he cannot distinguish anymore the beloved mother from the sensual woman sentimentally involved with a local playboy named Renzo. This painful epiphany becomes indeed for him a “*medicina molto amara, ne sarebbe morto o sarebbe guarito*” (58; “very bitter medicine, he would either be killed or healed” 51). But the attempt to free himself of his incestuous obsessions by finding “*un contravveleno*” (104; “an antidote” 91),

that is, the image of another woman--a prostitute--to set up between his mother and himself, while proving wrong the boys' calumnies about his presumed homosexuality, will ultimately fail: being too young, Agostino is prevented from entering the brothel, while the prostitute's naked body, glimpsed through an open window, will only act as a confirmation of the unsettling "womanly" features of the mother's. Caught in the crossfire between the equally tainted conceptions of sexuality perpetuated within the Bourgeois and the lower social classes "camps," his conclusive wishful desire to leave the seaside resort or, at least, to be finally recognized by his mother as an autonomous thinking subject acquires, as we will see, the sense of an ethical revolt full of Deleuzian *puissance*.

Written when Fascism was still in power, the novel opens, similarly to *The Children Are Watching Us*, on yet another falsely "serene" Bourgeois microcosm: a sun-drenched, water-filled, pre-oedipal context in which, as Lucia Re puts it, "the child believes itself to be a part of the (m)other and perceives no separation between itself and the world" (278), to the point that he is willing to follow her everywhere, "anche in fondo al mare" (7; "even to the bottom of the sea" 5), as the free indirect discourse deployed by Moravia informs us. Everything Agostino lives and experiences is initially lived and experienced through the figure of the mother, in a sort of intimate, exclusive, and almost obsessive, fusion between mother and child: "[...] il godimento di quella bellezza del mare e del cielo, egli lo doveva soprattutto all'intimità profonda in cui erano immersi i suoi rapporti con sua madre. Non ci fosse stata questa intimità, gli accadeva talvolta di pensare, che sarebbe rimasto di quella bellezza?" (7; "His own enjoyment of the beauty of sea and sky was really due above all to his deep sense of union with his mother. Were it not for this intimacy, it sometimes entered his head to wonder, what would remain of all that beauty?" 5). The days spent out at sea

become “un rito” (“a ritual”), to which Agostino is allowed to take part, “un mistero cui doveva la massima venerazione” (8; “a halo of mystery to which he owed the greatest reverence” 6).

Then, all of a sudden, “l’ombra di una persona ritta” (8; “a tall shadow” 6), symbolically and ominously falls between him and the sun, breaking the enchantment of this falsely serene and luminous world. The unexpected arrival of the dark, sunburned, young man who invites his mother out on the raft, will in fact eventually force Agostino to open his eyes and “ruzzolare giù da un’illusione come da una montagna, restando tutto ammaccato e dolente” (11; “come tumbling down from an illusory height and to lie bruised and wounded at the bottom” 8-9), when he realizes that he is not at the center of his mother’s universe anymore. Consequently, even though Agostino is at first totally oblivious to the exact nature of the relationship between his mother and Renzo, it is still *through* his eyes that we--as adult and knowing readers--first learn about the love affair that is unfolding on the beach. Agostino, on his part, cannot but silently witness all the “obscure” changes in his mother’s demeanor without grasping their actual meaning:

Agostino guardava, vide le mani del giovane che per sollevare la donna, affondavano nella carne bruna, là dove il braccio è più dolce e più largo, tra l’omero e l’ascella. Poi ella sedette sospirando e ridendo [...] Ma Agostino ricordava che quando erano soli, la madre, forte com’era non aveva bisogno di alcun aiuto per issarsi sul pattino: e attribuì quella richiesta di aiuto e quei dimenamenti del corpo che pareva compiacersi in femminili goffaggini, al nuovo spirito che aveva già operato in lei tanti e così sgradevoli cambiamenti. (15)

Agostino saw how in raising her the young man gripped her brown flesh with his fingers, just where the arm is softest and biggest, between the shoulder and the armpit. Then she sat down beside Agostino, panting and laughing [...] But Agostino remembered that when they were alone his mother was strong enough to climb into the boat without anyone’s aid, and attributed her appeal for help and her bodily postures, which seemed to draw attention to her

feminine disabilities, to the new spirit which had already produced such unpleasant changes in her. (12)

Here again, Moravia's protagonist perfectly incarnates the Deleuzian ideal of "being foreign in one's own language" (*Negotiations* 41), insofar as he is constantly surrounded by events, as well as by actual words, that he cannot fully grasp or whose intrinsic meaning escapes him altogether, but this enables him--and us readers with him--to *see* reality through a pure gaze, still untainted by all the clichés and well-established precepts that populate Bourgeois sexuality. Being as it were a liminal figure, the purity of his take on the outside world allows him, for instance, to denounce the intrinsic awkwardness of the daily boat trips in his mother's and Renzo's company, which make up a portrait that Agostino senses confusedly to be "falso e accomodato" (17; "false, and contrived for appearance' sake" 14). As Furio Jesi specifies in *Germania segreta*: "Essere abbandonati è la primordiale esperienza del feto espulso dall'utero materno: esperienza che apre nell'animo umano [un] sentimento di colpa e di vergogna insito anche nel ritorno alla madre" (150-51; "Being abandoned is the primordial experience of the fetus expelled from the maternal womb: an experience that opens in the human soul [a] sentiment of guilt and shamefulness implied also in the return to the mother"). And this is precisely what Agostino is bound to experience as his subversive and liminal take on the world captures gestures, attitudes, looks, and half-sentences between his mother and Renzo that will make him feel more and more "superfluo e vergognoso" (14; "superfluous and shameful" 11).

But it is not only his gaze that is deployed by the author in subtly subversive ways. Agostino's words too tend to give an estranged image of the real. Interestingly enough, his very first remark reported in direct discourse--in a novel that contains very few dialogues--is

actually a lie that he tells in order to hide his delusion for having been abandoned by the mother: “‘Mi sono molto divertito’ incominciò Agostino; e inventò che era stato in mare anche lui con i ragazzi della cabina attigua alla loro” (11; “‘I have had great fun,’ began Agostino, and he made up a story of how *he* had been bathing too with the boys from the next beach cabin” 9). Then, as the days go by, Agostino’s remarks start to consciously break through the mother’s subterfuges and false pretenses. On the day that Renzo fails to show up on the beach, for instance, Agostino’s attitude turns out to be highly disruptive, to the extent that the mother will react by slapping him in the face:

Agostino, dopo essere rimasto a lungo dietro la seggiola della madre, strisciando nella rena le girò intorno e ripeté con un tono di voce che avvertiva lui stesso fastidioso e quasi canzonatorio: ‘Ma è proprio vero? Oggi non si va in mare?’ La madre forse sentì la canzonatura e il desiderio di farla soffrire; o forse, quelle parole imprudenti bastarono a far traboccare un’irritazione a lungo covata. (19)

After sitting a long time behind his mother’s chair, drawing patterns in the sand, Agostino came around to her and said in a tone of voice which he felt to be teasing and even mocking: ‘Mamma, do you mean to say that we’re not going out on the raft today?’ His mother may have felt the mockery in his voice and the desire to make her suffer, or his few rash words may have sufficed to release her long-pent irritation. (17)

What causes the actual slap here is just a remark on Agostino’s part, as opposed to a *Just* remark, but precisely because of its simplicity it is, once again, all the more powerful in exposing the wall of hypocrisy that the bourgeois microcosm is more than willing to erect whenever it feels threatened or ridiculed, like in the case at hand. Moreover, from a strictly narrative point of view, the slap signals a pivotal moment in the plot, insofar as it ultimately allows for Agostino’s unexpected encounter with the street urchin Berto, who will draw him into a completely new dimension: “[...] l’istinto gli suggeriva che quel ragazzo rifugiatosi nella sua cabina era un’occasione, non avrebbe saputo dir quale; e che non doveva lasciarsela

sfuggire [...] gli parve andando con Berto, di perseguire non sapeva che oscura e giustificata vendetta” (23-27; “he felt instinctively that this boy’s hiding in the cabin just at that moment was an opportunity--he could not have explained of what sort--but certainly an opportunity he must not miss [...] In going with Berto he almost felt as if he were pursuing a mysterious and justified vendetta” 20-24).

Thus starts Agostino’s adventure on the other side of the “barricades,” in the neighboring “camp” of the lower social classes.³⁴ As the overtly symbolic names of the two bathing establishments readily reveal to us, this adventure will be a move from the fatuous triumphant arches of the quintessentially Bourgeois “Speranza Baths,” to the periferic and miserable wooden huts of the “Amerigo Vespucci Baths”, significantly located on the threshold of a no-man’s land. What Agostino will find in this second context is, quite literally--as implied by the name itself--a New World, an unexplored (mental) landscape, initially presented by Moravia almost in fairy-like terms: from the six-fingered, Ogre-like Saro, who lives in a shack small “come una casa di fiaba” (35; “like a house in a fairytale” 31), named “la tana” (“the hole”), and is later described “accovacciato e immobile, in tutto simile a un enorme batrace” (76; “hunched and motionless, like an enormous batrachian” 66), to the actual gang of youngsters, compared a few lines later to a group of “ranocchi” (“frogs”) or a cluster of “bianche propaggini di piante” (“white shoots of plants”).

³⁴ As Giuliano Dego rightly underlines in his preface to the Bompiani edition of the novel: “Mentre pressoché tutti i critici davano preponderante rilievo alla tematica sessuale di *Agostino*, non era comunque sfuggito ai più avveduti il fatto che nel libro era entrata, per la prima volta, la realtà delle classi” (xi; “Whereas most critics gave prominent relevance to the sexual theme contained in *Agostino*, it did not go unnoticed for the more shrewd, the fact that in the book had entered, for the first time, the reality of social classes”).

More in general, expressions such as “stupore” (“surprise”), “meraviglia” (“wonder”), “curiosità” (“curiosity”), “sgomento” (“dismay”), “oscuro” (“obscure”) and “strano” (“strange”), “nuovo” (“new”), punctuate all of Agostino’s encounters and/or clashes with the ways and habits outside of the falsely serene Bourgeois microcosm of his old life. It is indeed a reversed Wonderland for him, an upside-down world that turns out to be just as incomprehensible and mysterious as the one he has left behind. Right from the start, in fact, he enters into a vicious circle of abuses, in which Tortima and the other boys take revenge on his evident social superiority by taking advantage of his physical inferiority at arm wrestling, which then causes Agostino to attempt to take his own revenge on the little black boy, apparently thinner and weaker than him. And yet, despite all his initial disconcertedness and repugnance, “quella compagnia brutale e umiliante tornava ad esercitare nel suo animo un’oscura attrattiva” (53; the company of those young hoolingas began to exercise a mysterious attraction over him” 46). In a way, the gang perfectly embodies the Deleuzian idea of the Other as “a possible world” (*Michel* 306), a world that will eventually turn out to be equally hostile to Agostino, but capable of making him look back at his own context of origin from a totally different perspective. It is in fact through the gang of boys that Agostino is finally able to make sense of the obscure changes in his mother’s attitude, by learning everything about the true nature of her relationship with Renzo:

[...] ciò che gli pareva di aver sempre saputo e, come per un profondo sonno, dimenticato [...] Era, la nozione, simile a un oggetto rutilante e abbagliante che non si può guardare per lo splendore che emana e di cui si indovino a mala pena i contorni. Gli pareva di averla sempre posseduta; ma mai risentita con tutto il suo sangue (40-1)

[...] what he now felt he had already know but had somehow forgotten, as in a deep sleep [...] It was like some bright, dazzling object, which one cannot look at for the radiance it emits, so that one can only guess its real shape. He felt it

was something he had always possessed but only now he experienced in his blood (36).³⁵

This powerful epiphany--presented here as an awakening--together with the one concerning homosexuality, analogously revealed to him by the boys later on in the novel, will change forever Agostino's way of looking at the world and the falsely serene, unconscious, sun-drenched atmosphere of the beginning will be lost forever: "Tutto era oscuro in lui e intorno a lui. Come se, invece della spiaggia, del cielo e del mare risplendenti di sole, non vi fossero state che tenebre, nebbia e forme indistinte e minacciose" (74; "Everything seemed dark around him and within him, as if instead of beach, sea and sky, there were only shadows and vague, menacing forms" 64). Having passed through the looking glass of a microcosm that is completely different from his own, Agostino finally sees the mother for what she really is: "È una donna... nient'altro che una donna" (56; "She is a woman... nothing but a woman" 49), willfully represented by Moravia as the incarnation of non-genuine, technicized, Bourgeois sexuality. As Jesi puts it: "là dove il mito non è più compreso come genuino, l'immagine della donna si altera [...] e tende a diventare emblema di peccato e di orrore" (*Germania* 61; "where myth is not perceived as genuine anymore, the image of the woman is altered [...] and tends to become the emblem of sin and horror").

³⁵ The same will happen later on in the novel in regards to the concept of homosexual love, when, after spending a few hours with Saro alone on the little boat, the rest of the gang will give him the disquieting "spiegazione che questi presentiva senza rendersene conto" (73) 'an explanation which Agostino somehow expected, without being able to say why' (64). One thing that is worth noting here, in reference to the boat episode, is the powerful "disjunction of the sound and the visual" (*Cinema 2* 267), to use Deleuze's expression, that Moravia deploys in a literary context, instead of a cinematic one, by juxtaposing Carducci's lofty poems *Alle Fonti del Clitumno* (1876) and *Davanti San Guido* (1874), recited by Agostino in the dreary context of lust and perversion of the boat, thus creating an uncanny, ironic, and incommensurable "gap".

It is not by chance, in fact, that soon after Agostino's epiphany in regards to sexuality, the novel starts to register the progressive transformation of the mother-woman figure in Medusa, insofar as the Gorgon is precisely, "l'orrore che nasce dalla deformazione della vergine mitica" (*Germania* 71; "the horror that is born from the deformation of the mythical virgin". Interestingly enough, throughout the book, the mother is never once referenced, either by the narrator or by any of the characters, with her actual name, thus gaining the overtly symbolic value of an archetypal Bourgeois mother/woman. Consequently, the moment Agostino exits the falsely serene microcosm of Bourgeois life, she starts to acquire Medusa-like features in his eyes: "le ascelle si spalancavano all'aria come due fauci di serpenti: e come lingue nere e sottili ne sporgevano i lunghi peli molli" (54; "her armpits looked like the jaws of two snakes and the long, soft hair darted out of them like thin black tongues"). By the end of the novel, the transformation will be complete: "una ciocca molle e aguzza, viva come un serpente, le pendeva lungo la guancia" (111; "one soft, pointed lock, like a live snake, hung against her cheek"), and the last pages are actually full of subtly disquieting images, characterized by sexually implicit overtones: from the "largo sorriso nero [nella] pancia rosa" ("wide black smile [in] the pink belly") of Agostino's moneybox, to the "grosse farfalle brune e pelose" (113; "large butterflies, dark and hairy") that enter the window at night and beat their wings against the white glass-lampshade.

But this eye-opening experience does not bring the results Agostino was hoping for, insofar as his former state of obscure uneasiness is replaced only by an even darker, indeterminate, state of guilty curiosity towards the newly-discovered womanly features of his mother. As Jesi goes on to specify in *Germania segreta*, "l'incesto si compie nel cuore del mondo Borghese, quasi a significare la permeabilità di quel mondo sul limitare della

decadenza alle forze di distruzione che giacciono nella profondità dell'essere e che la società Borghese non è più in grado di esorcizzare" (131; "incest occurs at the heart of the Bourgeois world, as if to indicate the permeability of such world on the verge of decadence to the forces of destruction that lie in the depths of the human being and that Bourgeois society is unable to exorcise"). In this perspective, the *agalma* of the mother and the *agalma* of the woman become more and more indiscernible from one another, creating a profoundly unsettling Deleuzian crystal-image:

Che serviva vederci chiaro se questa chiarezza non portava che nuove e più fitte tenebre? Talvolta si chiedeva come facessero i ragazzi più grandi di lui ad amare la propria madre e al tempo stesso a sapere quello che egli stesso sapeva; e concludeva che questa consapevolezza doveva in loro uccidere a tempo l'affetto filiale, mentre in lui l'una non riusciva a scacciare l'altro e, coesistendo, torbidamente si mescolavano. [...] Dovunque, in casa, gli pareva di spiare i segni, le tracce della presenza di una donna, la sola che gli fosse dato di avvicinare; e questa donna era sua madre. [...] Avrebbe voluto gridarle: "Copriti, lasciami, non farti più vedere, non solo più quello di un tempo" (87-90)

What was the good of seeing clearly, if the clarity only brought with it deeper shades of darkness? Sometimes he wondered how older boys than himself managed to go on loving their mother when they knew what he knew; and he concluded that such knowledge must at once destroy their filial affection, whereas in his own case the one did not banish the other, but they existed side by side in a dreary triangle. [...] Everywhere in the house he seemed to spy out traces of a woman's presence, the only woman whom he had ever known intimately; and that woman was his mother [...] He would have liked to shout: "Cover yourself up, go away, don't let me see you anymore, I'm not the same as I used to be" (75-7)

As a direct consequence of his inability to deal with these inner oedipal drives, the profound reluctance to be around the mother will draw Agostino more and more to the Vespucci Baths, in order to seek refuge in the other "camp," even though here other torments, albeit of a different nature, await him, thus making that place "non meno odioso della casa"

(91; as odious to him as his home” 78). His desperate need to fight against his own newborn instincts pushes him to be as much as possible what the other boys seem to want him to be, that is, just like themselves. Hence, as soon as he finds himself alone at the Vespucci Baths, he will actually pretend to be one of them by taking out to sea on the raft a random man and his spoilt little son who have mistaken him for the cabin boy of the establishment, thus accomplishing, at least apparently, the on-going process of self-orphanization from his Bourgeois microcosm of origin. Ironically enough, at the end of the sequence, Agostino will even be pointed at as a living example of a poor but hardworking young boy to the Bourgeois kid that could very well be his own doppelgänger, while the father will appear fully pleased at having found such a useful object lesson for his son.

What is interesting to note here is that we are once again at a pivotal moment in the plot because it is precisely at this point of his reversed *bildung* that Agostino fully realizes he is actually caught “between camps”, that is, “si trovava ad avere perduto la primitiva condizione senza per questo essere riuscito ad acquistarne un'altra” (98; “he had lost his first estate without having succeeded in winning another” 85), because he is still much too sensitive and he still suffers from the coarse and clumsy jokes of the gang. As mentioned in my introduction to the dissertation, adopting a position between camps, in Gilroy’s terms, “can promote a rich theoretical understanding of culture as a mutable [...] phenomenon” (85), but it can also be a profounding disconcerting experience. One of the great merits of Moravia’s novel is precisely its attempt to acknowledge the complexity of the real through the contradictory and reversed *bildung* of Agostino. In this respect, compared to De Sica’s *The Children Are Watching Us*, we can note that Moravia’s young protagonist, who is father-orphaned right from the start, takes the analysis and condemnation of the surrounding world

a step further by exploiting his own intrinsic liminality so as to include, in his subversive condemnation, the approach of *both* social orders to sexuality and family. Hence, what we find at the core of Moravia's work, as Giuliano DeGo rightly points out, is actually a dual alienation:

la scoperta, da parte di Agostino, di un'alienazione a due facce: la propria assoluta ignoranza, dovuta a un'educazione sbagliata, circa le cose del sesso, e la degenerazione, sempre rispetto al sesso, dei ragazzi della banda: per i quali quella che, in senso vitale e in una società migliore, dovrebbe essere la purezza lawrenciana del sesso è naturalmente ridotta [...] a motivo di discorso osceno. (xii)

(the discovery, on Agostino's part, of a double-sided alienation: his absolute ignorance, due to an improper education, in regards to sexual matters, and the degeneration, always in reference to sex, of the gang's kids: for whom, that which, in a lively sense and in a better society, should be the Lawrencian purity of sex is naturally reduced [...] to a source for obscene discourses.)

In a way, what Moravia is trying to denounce here, is an entire *zeitgeist*, objectively embodied by the agonizing Fascist regime of 1942. It is not by chance that each and every character's attitude towards sexuality in the novel is portrayed somewhat negatively. None of them, in fact, seems capable of establishing a joyful, genuine, non-technicized approach to sexual matters. If, on the one side, the novel is very critical towards Bourgeois sexuality as a whole, on the other, Moravia shows that he doesn't have any illusions whatsoever on the supposedly good nature and wholesomeness of the lower social classes. Only Agostino stands out as a positive character, capable, thanks to his intrinsically liminal position as an Orphan-child, to shed new light even on one of the most well-established sexual practices in the world: prostitution.

Che rapporto c'era tra il denaro, che serve di solito ad acquistare oggetti ben definiti e di quantità riscontrabile, e le carezze, le nudità, e la carne femminile? [...] L'idea del denaro che avrebbe dato in cambio di quella vergognosa e

proibita dolcezza, gli pareva strana e crudele; come un'offesa, forse piacevole per chi la arrecava, ma dolorosa per chi la riceveva. (106)

What was the relation between money, which is generally used for acquiring quite definite objects with recognizable qualities, and a woman's caresses, a woman's naked flesh? [...] The idea of giving money in exchange for that shameful and forbidden pleasure seemed to him cruel and strange, an insult which the giver might find pleasant but which must be painful for the one who received it. (92)

What is most striking about the novel's ethical standpoint is that, while Agostino's pure gaze is more and more capable of exposing the walls of Bourgeois hypocrisy, proletarian class struggle, and accepted social practises such as prostitution, no one actually sees *him* for what he really is. This is true not only of the gang boys, who identify him simply as a spoilt Bourgeois, in whom richness and sexual perversity seem to generate and justify one another, or the brothel clients who consider him just an impudently curious little brat, but it's true also of the mother figure, who sees, treats, and thinks of him either too highly or too poorly, without ever acknowledging him as a thirteen-year-old thinking subject, capable of passing his own judgements on the world that surrounds him. First, in the opening page of the novel, she talks to him in a soft voice, "come se lui fosse stato un uomo e non un ragazzo di tredici anni" (5; "as if he had been a man instead of a thirteen-year-old boy" 3). Then, as soon as the lover enters the picture, Agostino becomes almost an invisible presence as if he were "un oggetto di cui si poteva disporre secondo le più capricciose convenienze" (13; "an object to be disposed of as her caprice or convenience might see fit" 10) or simply an "innocent", an epithet that causes in turn Agostino to tremble with repugnance "come a vedersi gettare addosso un cencio sporco e a non potersene liberare" (14; "as if a dirty rag had been thrown at him and he could not get rid of it"). This obliviousness to his feelings will keep increasing throughout the novel, to the extent that, by the end, she will see and treat him

as if he were merely a capricious little pet: “[...] a quel modo, egli pensò ancora, ella parlava talvolta al gatto di casa” (108; “[...] that was just how she sometimes spoke to the cat” 95).

Here again, no one seems to acknowledge and cherish the potentialities of renewal embedded in Orphan-child’s gaze, language and frame-of-mind. Everyone in the novel prefers to dismiss his take on the world as being flawed from the outset because of his supposed *inexperience*. But even though, deep down, Agostino knows that he should try to go on living just as before, “a questo pensiero sentiva tutto il suo animo ribellarsi” (124; “his whole soul rebelled at the bitter thought” 109). Hence, his desperately heartfelt ending request to leave the following day, “Vorrei partire domani” (125; “I want to go away tomorrow” 110), repeated twice, acquires the sense of a genuine ethical revolt, a profound need to flee away from the surrounding encamped reality which had already appeared, vividly and subversively, half-way through the novel:

Provava un vago, disperato desiderio di varcare il fiume e allontanarsi lungo il litorale, lasciando alle sue spalle i ragazzi, il Saro, la madre, e tutta la vecchia vita. Chissà che forse, camminando sempre dritto davanti a sè, lungo il mare, sulla rena bianca e soffice, non sarebbe arrivato in un paese dove tutte quelle brutte cose non esistevano. In un paese dove sarebbe stato accolto come voleva il cuore, e dove gli sarebbe stato possibile dimenticare tutto quanto aveva appreso, per poi riapprenderlo senza vergogna né offesa, nella maniera dolce e naturale che pur doveva esserci e che, oscuramente, presentiva. (78-9)
There arose in him a vague and desperate desire to ford the river and walk on and on down the coast, leaving far behind him the boys, Saro, his mother and all the old life. Who knows whether, if he were to go straight ahead and never turn back, walking on that soft white sand, he might not at last come to a country where none of these horrible things existed; a country where he would be welcomed as he longed to be, and where it would be possible for him to forget all he has learned and then learn it again without all that shame and horror, gently and naturally as he dimly felt that it might be possible. (68-9)

What Moravia's subversive deployment of the Orphan-child mythologem's perspective wants to imply here is that a different, genuine, type of sexuality is indeed possible. As underlined by Lucia Re in *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism*, the so-called "oedipal mechanism", made of castration, repression and subjugation to the Law--all of which are usually associated with the forces of Fascism, but are here just as active *both* within the Bourgeois context and the gang of young urchins--is not "naturally inherent in the family" (287). On the contrary, it has become an instrument for the reproduction and perpetuation of the mechanisms of repression only in specific political and historical situations, as Deleuze and Guattari have amply demonstrated in their seminal work *Anti-Oedipus* (1982). What we are dealing with here, then, is an attempt to present the traditional conceptions of sexuality from a twofold, liminal, perspective, namely the Orphan-child's. Such simple reversal allows, though, for a radical condemnation of clichés, a de-familiarizing effect for past and present readerships, which Deleuze justly identified as one of the main characteristics of Italian Neorealist cinema, but that can be fruitfully applied here also to Italian Neorealist narrative.

Overall, the ethical attempt of the novel is indeed to actively fight against what Gilroy defines as "camp-thinking"--an all-encompassing, closed elaboration of the real--by fostering a new way of experiencing and experimenting with reality, embodied here by a fully thinking and subversively liminal thirteen-year-old who openly refuses in the end to be belittled yet again by a world that doesn't want to acknowledge the potentialities of renewal embedded in his pure gaze: "Tu mi tratti sempre come un bambino" (126; "You always treat me like a child" 110). If read in this perspective, the closing of Moravia's 1942 novel may actually appear as an open-ending full of *puissance*, capable of changing the way we look at the world. After all, Agostino may well be the victim of a twofold alienation--as stated by Degeo

in his analysis--and a long, unhappy, time will have to pass before he can become a man--as the last line of the novel bleakly reports--but his subversive take on the world, as well as his final gesture of ethical revolt, are actually still full of agency for us readers.

Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*: An Orphan-child's De-Familiarizing Effect

As pointed out by Laclau in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, Derrida has justly demonstrated that within--or rather at the "outset" of--every identity there exists an ontologically conflictual dimension, that is difficult to overcome: "An identity's constitution is always based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles [...] What is peculiar to the second term is thus reduced to the function of an accident as opposed to the essentiality of the first. [...] 'Woman' and 'black' are thus 'marks' (i.e. marked terms) in contrast to the unmarked terms 'man' and 'white'" (33). In quoting Derrida, Laclau seems to pinpoint here one of the central paradoxes of contemporary post-structuralist thinking, especially in its manifestations most interested in critiquing the social sphere, that is: the recurrence, even in disciplines of "rupture," like gender studies or post-colonial studies, of identity terms that are already heavily connoted per se, mostly in a negative way.

In this regard, one of the great merits of Calvino's 1947 first novel, *The Path to the Spiders' Nest*, is precisely that of de-familiarizing every closed elaboration of the real through its Orphan-child protagonist, the ten-year-old Pin, whose main function, as we will see, appears to be that of fostering new cerebral circuits in the reader's mind, just like in a Deleuzian time-image. As Lucia Re puts it:

The narrative of *The Path* is able to problematize the binary logic of the oppositions subject/object, self/other, Imaginary/Symbolic, nature/culture, normal/deviant, masculine/feminine, childhood/adulthood, fantasy/reality, and myth/history, because it is framed through the unstable, shifting perspective of

a naïve focalizer who does not know the differences on which these cultural oppositions are based and through which individual and collective history are represented (282)

In his 1964 preface to the novel, it is actually Calvino himself who underlines that one of his main intents in writing this novel was to fight against clichés, automatic responses, habits and the supposedly self-evident truths of camp-thinking, by challenging the readership of the time to rethink and question, at various levels, the inherited and commonsensical conceptions of the world, as well as its fictional representations, so as to move beyond every camp-mentality as such, especially in reference to the highly debated phenomenon of the Italian Resistance movement during WWII:

Oggi quando di si parla di “letteratura impegnata” ci se ne fa un’idea sbagliata. Come d’una letteratura che serve da illustrazione a una tesi già definita a priori [...] Io volevo combattere contemporaneamente su due fronti, lanciare una sfida ai detrattori della Resistenza e nello stesso tempo ai sacerdoti d’una Resistenza agiografica ed edulcorata (1192)

Nowadays when one talks about “committed literature” one generally has a mistaken notion of the term, as though it were a kind of writing that is simply an illustration of a thesis already defined a priori [...] I wanted to conduct a campaign on two fronts simultaneously: to launch an attack both against the detractors of the Resistance and against the high-priests of a hagiographic Resistance that was all sweetness and light (15).

But in order to achieve this much needed twofold estrangement effect, it was necessary to approach the topic “non di petto, ma di scorcio” (1191; “not head on but obliquely” 15), that is, through the prism of a child’s gaze, which, as we have seen in chapter one, can be considered as one of the main characteristics of the Italian Neorealist experience as a whole, both in cinema, and in literature. In the case at hand, though, this change of perspective allows for a very powerful and symbolic substitution, insofar as: “l’inferiorità di Pin come bambino di fronte all’incomprensibile mondo dei grandi corrisponde a quella che

nella stessa situazione provavo io, come borghese” (1199; “Pin’s inferiority as a child facing the incomprehensible world of adults was the equivalent of the inferiority that I too felt in the same situation because of my middle-class upbringing” 24). In other words, by acknowledging and relinquishing at the same time his own Bourgeois take on the world, Calvino’s deployment of the Orphan-child mythologem is aimed, as we will see, at fostering an actual neo-realism, a new way of looking at reality, far removed from any camp-thinking attitude.

Written and published in 1947, the novel opens in the lively back alleys of Calvino’s hometown, Sanremo, a seaside town on the Ligurian coast in the North of Italy, during WWII, and it progressively moves up towards the surrounding mountains as it follows the adventurous experiences of its young and freckly protagonist, Pin, an orphan-child, whose sister, Rina, also known as The Dark Girl, is a local prostitute openly engaged in offering her services to the German troops that have occupied the city. Shunned by adults and kids alike, Pin initially accepts to steal a gun from one of his sister’s clients in order to win the respect of the grownups at the local tavern where he spends most of his time, but, disappointed by their tepid reaction, decides to hide it instead in a secret place: a grassy slope where spiders have their lairs.

Henceforth, his constant search for a Great Friend with whom to share his secret hiding place will bring him into contact with a wide variety of characters: from his now-imprisoned master cobbler Pietromagro, to the young communist and partisan fighter Red Wolf; from Mancino the Trotskyist agitator, to Pelle the traitor turncoat; all the way to the partisan detachment made of petty thieves, *carabinieri*, ex-soldiers, black marketeers, and down-and-outs, placed under the controversial leadership of Dritto. As the intricate plotline

unfolds, Pin will soon find himself relegated to the margins of this group that is itself on the margins of the Resistance struggle, but this is precisely what allows Calvino to deploy a privileged, liminal, point of view on the entire partisan warfare phenomenon.

In the end, the fatal attraction between Dritto and the wife of another partisan, Giglia, will cause quite literally, albeit inadvertently, a destructive fire that represents a non turning-point in the fabula: after participating in one last ambush against the Germans, the entire brigade is dismantled, Dritto is unwillingly sentenced to death by the partisans' commissar Kim for his shortcomings as a leader, and Pin is forced once again to seek refuge amongst the spiders' nests, after retrieving by pure chance his pistol from his sister's hands. Here, he will be unexpectedly reached by the lonely partisan fighter Cousin and the novel closes with an unsettling and purposely ambiguous ending, in which Pin's newly found Great Friend might actually be the one who literally "orphanizes" him once and for all by killing his compromised sister--as the gun shots overheard in the distance might well imply--before the two of them walk off into the night hand in hand, surrounded by fireflies that are significantly portrayed as being both beautiful and filthy.

Now, if we start analyzing the novel in depth, we can notice that the "path" at the core of the book might well be considered as a literary rendering of the "voyage form" and the "dispersive situation" identified by Deleuze as two of the main characteristics of Italian Neorealist cinema, just like Calvino's willful rejection of the preterite in favor of the present tense as the main verb tense used in the novel reveals a profound "consciousness of clichés" on his part, insofar as the novel (as a literary genre) and history (as an epistemological practice) have always been closely linked to each other precisely by the use of the preterit.

In this regard, Lucia Re is undoubtedly right when she notices that the use of the present tense combined with the deployment of a child's perspective implies on Calvino's part a "fascination of beginnings [...] of discovery, and of unlimited possibilities" (200), but what she fails to properly highlight is that the child in question is actually an *orphan*-child, which--as we have seen in chapter one--can be considered perhaps as *the* most relevant mythologem of all in reference to new beginnings. As Jesi specifies in the introduction to *Letteratura e mito*, in fact:

Ciascuno, volgendosi verso la propria nascita, contempla e sperimenta una cosmogonia. [...] L'orfano fisserà i suoi occhi sulla fine del ciclo iniziato con la sua nascita e si sentirà [...] "l'ultimo della sua stirpe," il predestinato a nominare e ad evocare per l'ultima volta gli arredi del proprio universo (11) (Everyone, in turning towards his or her infancy, contemplates and experiments a cosmogony [...] The orphan will fix his eyes on the end of the cycle that started with his birth and will feel as if he is [...] "the last of his descent," the predestined to name and evoke for the last time the furnishings of his own universe).

What is striking about Pin's character in *The Path to The Spiders' Nests* is precisely the intrinsic loneliness of his Orphan-child condition, which throughout the novel tends to alienate him more and more from the rest of human society. If, at first, he feels "solo e sperduto in quella storia di sangue e corpi nudi che è la vita degli uomini" (14; "alone and lost amid all this talk of bloodshed and naked bodies which makes up men's lives" 42), the consciousness of his solitude will intensify gradually: "L'essere all'aperto gli dà un senso strano di piccolezza che non è paura. Ora Pin è solo, solo su tutto il mondo" (51; "Being out in the open gives Pin a strange sense of smallness, not of fear. He is alone now, alone in the whole world" 81), to the extent that, by the end of the novel, he fully realizes that he is

indeed “solo al mondo, sempre più solo (144; “alone in all the world, and lonelier than ever” 181).³⁶

What I want to argue here is that Pin’s loneliness might be considered as intrinsically connected to the subversive “liminality” of every genuine Orphan-child mythologem, of which Pin is perhaps the best incarnation within the Italian Norealist experience of 1940s, together with De Sica’s Totò. In other words, being a full-blown orphan-child figure, Pin is literally suspended throughout the novel between two worlds, caught between opposite camps, without ever fully belonging to either. If, on the one side, compared to the other kids, he is “il più debole di tutti” (10; “the weakest of them all” 37), on the other, he is first described by the narrator with a “giacca troppo da uomo per lui” (5; “a jacket that is too big for him” 31) and a “voce rauca da bambino vecchio” (6; “hoarse voice of a much older boy” 32).

At the same time, being a liminal figure, he can walk around during curfew at night with no problems, “perché è un bambino e le pattuglie non gli dicono niente (25-6; “because he is only a child [...] and the patrols don’t say anything to him”) just like, later in the novel, he can easily breach a road-block because: “Pin sa che essere un bambino è comodo alle volte, e che se anche dicesse che è un partigiano nessuno ci crederebbe (140; “Pin realizes how useful it sometimes is to be a child, and how no one would believe him even if he said quite openly that he was a partisan” 177). More in general, his quintessential and lonely liminality appears evident in his everyday interactions, as the first chapter of the novel readily reveals to us:

Pin si trova da solo a girare nei vicoli, con tutti che gli gridano impropri e lo cacciano via. Si avrebbe voglia di andare con una banda di compagni, allora,

³⁶ Page references are to the Mondadori Meridiani edition (Milano: Mondadori, 1991) for the original Italian version and to the Ecco Press edition (New York: Ecco P, 2000) for the English translation

compagni cui spiegare il posto dove fanno il nido i ragni [...] ma i ragazzi non vogliono bene a Pin: è l'amico dei grandi, Pin, sa dire ai grandi cose che li fanno ridere e arrabbiare, non come loro che non capiscono nulla quando i grandi parlano. [...] E a Pin non resta che rifugiarsi nel mondo dei grandi, dei grandi che pure gli voltano la schiena, dei grandi che pure sono incomprensibili e distanti per lui come per gli altri ragazzini, ma che sono più facili da prendere in giro, con quella voglia delle donne e quella paura dei carabinieri (10-1)

Pin wanders round the alleys alone, with everyone cursing and pushing him aside. The he longs to go off with a band of young companions to whom he could show the place where spiders make their nests [...] But Pin is not liked by boys of his own age; he is the friend of grown-ups, Pin is, he can say things to grown-ups that make them laugh or get angry, while other boys can't even understand what grown-ups say to each other [...] So Pin is forced to take refuge again in the world of grown-ups, of men who turn their back on him and are incomprehensible and far-removed from him as they are from the other little boys, but who are easier to make fun of, with their yearning for women and their terror of the police (37-8).

Consequently, Pin's intrinsic liminality as an "unstable signifier" par excellence is perceived as highly threatening, like the in the case of the non-dead, with whom Agamben-- as we have seen in chapter one--tends to associate every child figure as such. Not only does Pin know all the facts and secrets of the neighborhood where he lives, which makes him a potentially disruptive presence, with whom no one wants to fool around: "A canzonare Pin c'è sempre da rimettere: conosce tutti i fatti del carrugio e non si sa mai cosa va a tirar fuori" (6; "Insulting Pin is always risky; he knows all the inside gossip of the alley and one can never tell what he'll come out with" 32); but people are actually always wary of him, as if they recognized unconsciously his intrinsic *puissance* to disrupt every encamped and/or falsely serene status quo: "Pin è un bamino che fa un po' paura a tutti con le sue uscite" (90; "Everyone is a little nervous of Pin, as they never know what they he will say" 123). Even women, like Giglia, try to put on a maternal air with him, when in fact "hanno un po' paura di lui" (117; "they are just afraid of him" 152) and, more in general, "gli uomini insultano

Pin che legge i loro pensieri e li canzona” (78; “the men swear at Pin for reading their thoughts and mocking them” 110). At the same though, people also seem secretly attracted by him: “gli altri pendono dalle sue labbra per sentire cosa tira fuori” (82; “the others are hanging on his lips to hear what he’ll come out with” 114), thus acknowledging, in a way, his intrinsically twofold nature of crisis and renewal.

Being a quintessentially liminal and double-sided figure, the mythologem of the Orphan-child acquires, yet again, in the course of the novel almost god-like features, like in De Sica’s *Miracle in Milan*. When Pin walks the woods in perfect solitude, for instance, the narrator informs us that he is suddenly “ripreso dal contagio del peloso e ambiguo carnaio del genere umano” (89; “caught up again in the sickness of the hairy, ambivalent charnel-house of humanity” 121), as if he didn’t belong to the human world in the first place. Moreover, his secret hiding place--the path to the spiders’ nests--is portrayed as a truly magic context where Pin “potrà fare strani incantesimi, diventare un re, un dio” (141; “can weave strange spells, become a king, a god” 178). There, his gestures appear almost omnipotent, like when he inadvertently shoots the gun at one of the tiny spider tunnels: “Non si sente più niente, come se quello sparo avesse ucciso tutta la terra” (25; “Not a sound is to be heard, as if that shot had killed off the entire world” 53).

Interestingly enough, by the end of the novel Pin will actually decide to avenge himself on the entire community of grown-ups in a scene characterized by punitive, god-like, overtones: “si sente spietato: li ferirà senza misericordia (133; “he feels ruthless; he’ll hurt them without any pity” 170). As a result of Pin’s “angelismo eversivo” (37; “subversive angelicism”)--to use De Santi’s expression--which pushes him to denounce the wall of hypocrisy and subterfuges that characterizes the adult world, everyone is forced to face the

truth and reacts accordingly: “Giglia [...] ride falso: ha paura. [Duca], davanti al ghigno di Pin, rimane come ipnotizzato [...] Gli uomini pendono dalle labbra di Pin” (135; “Giglia [makes] a forced laugh; she is frightened. [Duke] seems almost hypnotized by Pin’s grin. [...] The men are now hanging on Pin’s every word” 170-2). Such magic suspension continues right until Dritto decides to break the spell by physically attacking the boy while shouting: “Zitto, bastardo, zitto!” (137; “Shut up, you little bastard, shut up!” 174), thus acknowledging implicitly Pin’s highly subversive liminality, capable of disrupting the status quo.

Now, if we start to retrace and highlight the actual sites of subversion associated in the novel with the Orphan-child’s perspective, namely, the textual instances in which Pin’s take on the world seems capable of confronting the reader with an estranged image of the real, we can notice right away that adults appear to him as a “razza ambigua e traditrice” (“an untrustworthy, treacherous lot”), precisely because “non hanno quella terribile serietà nei giochi propria dei ragazzi, pure hanno anch’essi i loro giochi, sempre più seri, un gioco dentro l’altro che non si riesce mai a capire qual è il gioco vero” (22; “they don’t take their games in the serious wholehearted way children do, and yet they too have their own games, one more serious than the other, one game inside another, so that’s impossible to discover what the real one is” 50). Analogously, war itself is initially nothing but a game to Pin: “Sembra di giocare a nascondersi. Solo che non c’è differenza tra il gioco e la vita e si è obbligati a giocare sul serio, come piace a Pin” (46; “Like playing hide-and-seek; except that there is no difference between the game and real life, and it has to be played seriously, which Pin likes” 76). Only later will he learn at his own expenses the hardships of war and, at that point, his first reaction will be to fantasize a different world, in which a dead hawk-- significantly named Babeuf!--can become a means to magically fly away “fino a un paese

incantato dove tutti siano buoni” (123; “[to] an enchanted land were all the inhabitants were good” 159).

More in general, as noted by Lucia Re, “Pin resorts to the only interpretative code he has: a heterogeneous and fragmentary oral repertoire made up of childhood stories and fables, plots of films and comic-strip adventure stories, folk songs, and various more or less legendary anecdotes” (178). Such a fantasy-driven and open-ended interpretative code functions in turn as a powerful de-familiarizing and uncanny effect for us readers, insofar as it allows for a complete re-creation of the world, as implied by Jesi’s initial quotation on the orphan-child’s ability to (re-)name the furnishings of his universe.

The gun that punctuates the plot, for instance, functions as a subtly unsettling leitmotif, insofar as it is a metonymic symbol for the war itself, but is constantly estranged through Pin’s gaze and frame-of-mind. It can thus acquire either magical connotations of empowerment “uno che ha una pistola vera può tutto, è come un uomo grande” (18; “someone who has a real pistol can do anything, he’s like a grown-up” 46), or playful and uncanny overtones, like in its fable-like and surreal encounter with a shoe, capable of estranging both objects in the reader’s eyes: “Una scarpa [...] e una pistola; a farli incontrare uno con l’altro si possono fare cose mai pensate, si possono far loro recitare storie meravigliose” (19; “A shoe [...] and a pistol; by putting them up against each other he can do wonders, make them tell marvelous tales” 46-47).

If the other kids simply play with “pistole di latta e spade di legno” (17; “tin pistols and wooden swords” 44), Pin’s intrinsic difference is signaled also by his coming into contact with real weapons, albeit all completely de-familiarized, to the extent that he will handle the gun as if it were “un gatto [che tiri] per la collottola” (18; “a cat [that you pull] by

the neck” 46) or “un giocattolo sotto il guanciale” (52; “a toy under [the] pillow” 82) or even “una bambola” (143; “a doll” 181). In each and every case, Pin’s subversive frame-of-mind transforms every weapon in something different: “Le pistole non sono più arnesi per uccidere, ma giocattoli strani e incantati” (90; “pistols no longer seem instruments for killing people, but strange enchanted toys” 123).

After all, as stated by Calvino himself in his 1983 lecture *Mondo scritto e mondo non scritto* at the New York University: “l’effetto di estraniamento in letteratura, ci spinge a rompere lo schermo di parole e di concetti e vedere il mondo come se si presentasse per la prima volta” (*Mondo* 1871) “the estrangement effect in literature urges us to break through the screen of words and concepts and see the world as if it appeared for the first time to our sight” (39). And this is exactly what happens within *The Path to The Spiders’ Nests*, where everything becomes de-familiarized by the overt contrast between the ingenuity of the internal focalizer and the supposedly superior knowingness of us readers.

For Pin, new words have always a halo of mystery: “Un *gap*? Cosa sarà un *gap*?” (13; “A *Gap*? What could a *Gap* be?” 41) and, later on in the novel, “*Sten*: ecco un’altra parola misteriosa. *Sten*, *gap*, *sim*, come si fa a ricordarsele tutte? (46; “*Sten*; another mysterious word; *Sten*, *Gap*, *Sim*, how can anyone ever remember them all?” 76). Interestingly enough, the three words in question were indeed all too familiar for any 1947 reader, insofar as they referred, respectively, to the communist Gruppi d’Azione Patriottica (Groups of Patriotic Action), the controversial Servizio Informazioni Militare (Military Information Service) of the time and the homonymous British submachine gun distributed to many Italian partisans during WWII. But thanks to Pin’s genuine Orphan-child perspective, they all acquire a new ring to them, if not altogether a comic, cartoon-like, overtone, just like the word “p-trentotto”

("p-thirty-eight"), or the word "troschista" ("trotskyist"), appear equally estranged in the protagonist's mindset, not to mention the involuntary comic effect achieved by his mistaking Comitato for an actual person, rather than the partisan "committee" to which the Italian word "comitato" obviously refers.³⁷

Hence, the supposedly familiar history of the Italian Resistance movement loses indeed its familiarity and appears before us as an enigmatic, gap-riddled tale, in which past and present readers are called upon to establish new mental connections, new cerebral circuits, that can fill the "gaps" in question, like in a Deleuzian time-image. In a way, as Lucia Re puts it: "Calvino gives his readers an image of the partisan struggle as an unleashing of human imagination and fantasy, as a projection of a desire for a better and freer way of life leading to the possibility of an authentic emancipation of the subject" (227).

But if this is true, then it is not by chance that one of Calvino's main targets within the novel is actually propaganda as such. In this regard, the character of Red Wolf is portrayed as the exact opposite of Pin, insofar as he is the perfect embodiment of a camp-mentality approach to the world. For one thing, he has willfully chosen for himself as a partisan "un nome con qualcosa di rosso perché il lupo è un animale fascista" (37; "a name with something red in it because the wolf's a Fascist animal" 66), which makes him right from the start a highly politicized figure, fully engaged in contending the opponents' symbols of power, albeit in an equally encamped way. Whenever he talks, in fact, his speech is full of ideologically charged precepts and maxims, that he simply continues to repeat mechanically,

³⁷ Drawing on such open-ended attitude, even the battle-names chosen by Italian partisans can be interpreted as part and parcel with the child-like approach to reality embodied by Pin. According to historian and former partisan Roberto Battaglia, for instance, "[...] it is almost as if Italians needed--after so much indifference, pettiness and selfishness--to look at reality with the light and agile spirit of a child, in order to be able to live and die without rhetoric" (231).

without ever questioning their intrinsic meaning: “quando il popolo avrà liberato l’Italia, inchiodiamo la borghesia alle sue responsabilità” (35; “When Italy’s been liberated by the people, then we’ll nail the bourgeoisie down to their responsibilities” 65); “[I detenuti comuni] sono proletariato senza coscienza di classe” (38; “[ordinary criminals] are proletarians without class-consciousness” 68), “il primo onore [...] è quello della causa” (66; “Honor [...] is due to Cause first” 98) or “L’estremismo, malattia infantile del comunismo!” (67; “Extremism: Communism’s infantile disorder” 99).

Put in the mouth of an overtly indoctrinated sixteen-year-old boy, these words lose their supposedly revolutionary appeal and sound completely empty, if not altogether comical. But political propaganda is de-familiarized by Calvino in other ways as well within the novel. One of the most significant scenes in this regard, is the one in which Lupo Rosso repeatedly urges Pin to follow his example and write a political slogan on the cement wall of a water-tank to better indoctrinate the passers-by. But instead of writing “Long live Italy” or “Long Live the Allies”, as suggested by Lupo Rosso, or even “Long Live Lenin”, as witnessed years before on a wall in his alley, Pin first draws dirty pictures, thus infuriating Red Wolf: “Sei Matto? Bella propaganda ci facciamo!” (49; “You mad? Fine propaganda that’ll make” 78), and then ends up writing a simple curse word, only because “A Pin non piace scrivere [...] E poi il W è una lettera che si sbaglia sempre” (49; “Pin does not enjoy writing [...] Besides, the W for ‘Viva’ is very difficult to write properly” 79). The curse word “arse” is obviously just a word, totally unrelated to politics, as opposed to Red Wolf’s Just words, but it is precisely its randomness that--in a literary rendering of a Deleuzian time-image--makes it all the more powerful in breaking through the Fascist frame-of-mind which appears to be just as

active in *Red Wolf*, insofar as this latter cannot but interpret everything through the equally technicized lens of communist ideology.

Pin, on his part, doesn't understand a single word Red Wolf tells him, just like-- earlier in the book--he is totally unable to grasp the meaning of Pietromagro's long monologue on the essence of communism: "Pin non capisce bene il senso di questo discorso" (40; "Pin cannot quite grasp the meaning of this speech" 69). On the contrary, from Pin's point of view, "le teste da morto [...] sono molto più d'effetto delle stelle tricolore" (37; "a death's head as a badge [...] makes more of a show than a tricolor star" 67), which is a way for Calvino to denounce the intrinsic powerfulness of the opponents' symbols, an aspect that should never be underestimated, as the partisans' commissar Kim will justly point out in his political reflections later on in the novel.

Having lived most of his short life in a time of war, Pin "non sa bene la differenza tra quando c'è la guerra e quando non c'è" (91; "does not know the difference between when there's war and when there isn't" 123), so Fascists and Nazis are not initially perceived as real enemies by him. Hence, Pin is indeed capable of crossing all sorts of boundaries and "camps," without ever losing his open-ended and curious mind-set, to the extent that: "Se ci si mettesse d'accordo [con i tedeschi e i fascisti] sarebbe bello spiegare a costoro dove fanno il nido i ragni. [Loro] possono cantare canzoni oscene per le vie [e] questo è meraviglioso" (29-32; "if he could make friends with [the Germans and Fascists] it would be fine to explain to them where the spiders make their nests. [They] can sing obscene songs in the streets [and] that's wonderful" 57-61).

In other words, the very concept of having an enemy is at first totally alien to him. "Pin non sa ancora cosa vuol dire: avere dei nemici. In tutti gli esseri umani per Pin c'è

qualcosa di schifoso come in vermi e qualcosa di buono e caldo che attira la compagnia. (68; “Pin does not yet realize what it means, to have enemies. To Pin there’s something as disgusting as worms about all human beings; and something good and warm, too, which draws him to their company” 100). This is precisely what will compel him throughout the novel to look for a “Great Friend” with whom to share the secret place where spiders do their nests, even though it is a quest destined to remain unfulfilled right until the end, as the highly problematic and ambiguous closing of the novel seems to imply.

The plot, in fact, comes indeed full circle and, in the last chapter, Pin feels as if he were back at that night when he stole the pistol, albeit all the more alone. Nevertheless, it is precisely at this point that Cousin reappears in middle of the night, yet again, in a fantasy-driven context, like a *deus ex machina*, entrusted by Calvino to rescue Pin each and every time: “Questi sono posti magici, dove ogni volta si compie un incantesimo. [...] E anche il Cugino è un grande mago” (144; “These are enchanted places, where magical things always happen. [...] And Cousin is also like a great magician” 181). In this sense, we can indeed argue together with Jesi that: “La notte non è demonica quando la si intende [...] quale utero fecondo di forze che determinano dinanzi all’Io la nascita della misteriosa figura dell’Altro, del fratello” (*Germania* 155; “Night is not demonic if interpreted [...] as a womb fecund of forces that determine in the face of the I the birth of the mysterious figure of the Other, the brother”).

At the same time, though, we cannot overlook the fact that the ending pages of the novel are full of sudden reversals and abrupt changes of perspective regarding the exact status of this Other, perfectly embodied by the double-sided figure of Cousin, which Pin has great difficulty in deciphering. For Pin, in fact, Cousin “è uno che chissà quanta gente ha

ammazzato e può permettersi d'essere buono senza rimorsi" (56; "is a person who has done a lot of killing and can allow himself to be good without regrets" 86), but he remains completely oblivious to the fact that his newly-found Great Friend might well be responsible for the killing of his sister, an aspect that calls into question the very distinction between good and bad uses of violence at the core of the ethical reflections contained in chapter nine. In a way, it is indeed all a matter of perspective, just like for the double-sided nature of the fireflies that close the narration: creatures that are both "belle" ("beautiful") and "schifose" ("filthy").

To me, such open-ended ambiguity is possibly the novel's most powerful legacy in a time in which opposing camps were already trying to impose their biased take on the world. After all, as noted by Lucia Re, "the *Path* is an ironic and hybrid text because it deploys a multiplicity of interpretative codes and because it incorporates a multiplicity of genres and modes of discourse but always 'with reservations'" (356). If the commander Ferreira--like Red Wolf--conceives partisan warfare as "una cosa esatta, perfetta [...] come una macchina" (99; "as exact and precise as a machine" 132), Kim's self-questioning throughout chapter nine expresses, on the contrary, "an anxiety that is an integral part of his opposition to Fascism" (Re 348), insofar as, thanks to his genuine interest in humanity, he is willing to acknowledge the inescapable complexity of the real, in which collective motives become individual motives "con mostruose deviazioni e impensati aggiustamenti" (100; "forming monstrous deviations and unexpected combinations" 133). In Kim's eyes, the highly problematic concept of "Fatherland"--already powerfully estranged within the novel by Pin's Orphan-child perspective--becomes an infinite struggle of symbols, a game of substitutions, "in cui ogni cosa o persona diventa un'ombra cinese, un mito [...] e basta un nulla, un passo

falso, un impennamento dell'anima e ci si ritrova dall'altra parte" (105-56; "in which everything and everybody becomes a Chinese shadow-play, a myth [...] and any little thing, a false step, a momentary impulse, is enough to send them over to the other side" 139). In other words, the line that separates a "genuine" myth from a "technicized" one is indeed thinner than we may like to think... The only appreciable difference, as willfully implied by Kim's reflections, is simply between a "closed" or an "open-ended" interpretation of the real:

"Da noi niente va perduto, nessun gesto, nessuno sparo, pur uguale al loro [...] va perduto, tutto servirà se non a liberare noi a liberare i nostri figli, a costruire un'umanità senza più rabbia [...] L'altra è la parte dei gesti perduti: degli inutili furori, [perché] non servono a liberare ma a ripetere e perpetuare quel furore e quell'odio" (106)

"On our side nothing is lost, not a single gesture, not a shot, though each may be the same as theirs [...] they will all serve if not to free us to free our children, to create a world without resentment [...] The others are on the side of lost gestures, of useless resentment [because] they are not helping to free themselves but to repeat and perpetuate resentment and hatred" (140).

If read along these lines, the highly debated chapter nine might then appear not as something hybrid and artificial, that affects negatively the supposed uniformity of the novel, as many of its first readers accused it to be, but rather as a powerful *mise en abyme* of the entire novel's ethical standing, a sort of literary rendering of the Deleuzian crystal-image, in which the two characters of Pin and Kim become almost indiscernible from one another, not only in the overt assonance of their names, but also and foremost in their common open-ended take on the world. Consequently, Kim's wanderings--and wonderings--along the wood's paths will appear in the end strikingly similar to Pin's: "quando [Kim] ragiona da solo andando per i sentieri, le cose ritornano misteriose e magiche, la vita degli uomini piena di miracoli [...] Ogni tanto gli sembra di camminare in un mondo di simboli, come il piccolo Kim in mezzo all'India, nel libro di Kipling tante volte riletto da ragazzo. 'Kim... Kim... Chi

è Kim?” (108; “when [Kim] is walking alone and reasoning within himself things become mysterious and magical again, and life seems full of miracles. [...] Sometimes he feels he is walking amid a world of symbols, like his namkesake, little Kim in the middle of India, in that book of Kipling’s which he had so often reread as a boy. ‘Kim... Kim... Who is Kim...?’” 142)

To conclude, as this purposely open-ended question readily reveals to us, in Calvino’s 1947 novel, *The Path to the Spiders’ Nests*, we witness the laudable attempt to rethink the concept of “identity” (in regards to politics, ethics, culture, gender, age, etc...) in a non-Fascist, non-exclusive, and non-byist way, finally enabling us to move beyond every camp thinking attitude as such. If it’s true, in fact--going back to Derrida’s initial definition--that every affirmation of identity entails a radical mechanism of exclusion, then the “relation of ban” (28), placed by Agamben at the basis of Western conceptions of dominance in his seminal work *Homo Sacer* (1995), might then be fruitfully extended to any notion of identity closed on itself. In other words, the real danger hidden in every politics founded on the pure and simple identity of its subjects--be it a minority identity or not--is nothing but fundamentalism, that is, “fascitization,” conceived as a technicized and closed elaboration of the real, which is exactly the opposite of the genuine deployment of myth advocated within *The Path to The Spiders’ Nests*.

After all, as Calvino specified years later, in a 1976 lecture on *Right and Wrong Political Uses of Literature* at Amherst College, “la letteratura è necessaria alla politica prima di tutto quando essa dà voce a ciò che è senza voce, [...] e specialmente a ciò che il linguaggio politico esclude o cerca d’escludere” (358; “literature is necessary to politics above all when it gives a voice to whatever is without a voice, [...] especially to what the

language of politics excludes or attempts to exclude” 98). Hence, giving voice--or adopting the gaze of--the excluded par excellence, that is, the genuine Orphan-child, might indeed be a way to foster an actual Neo-realism, a *new* way of looking at the world, still valuable today in overcoming all sorts of encamped, binary, and simplistic, oppositions.

Pavese’s *The House On The Hill: The Wake Up Call of an Orphan-Child*

“Nulla è più terrificante del trovarsi in mezzo agli uomini e non sapere perché non si debbano uccidere” (89; “Nothing is more terrifying than to discover oneself a man amongst men without having a clue as to why men are not to be killed”). Such a strikingly disquieting claim, almost unbearable in its truth, is to be found at the center of Furio Jesi’s essay *Mitologie intorno all’Illuminismo*, *Mythologies on the Enlightenment*, published posthumously in 1990, ten years after his premature death. By underlining the subtle uneasiness felt by the Enlightened *philosophes* when faced with James Cook’s confirmation on the actual existence of human sacrifices amongst the “innocent” savages of Tahiti in 1777, Jesi establishes an illuminating parallelism between the ritualistic cruelty of such savages and the equally brutal--and ritualistic--practices of both Robespierre and Sade:

Giacchè il rituale consente *comunque* di riacquistare innocenza, Sade insiste nel sottolineare il carattere assolutamente arbitrario, gratuito, ‘ragionevolmente’ immotivato delle leggi che infliggono la morte. [...] Con maggiore profondità e con maggiore franchezza sia di Robespierre sia di Joseph de Maistre, Sade affermò esplicitamente che non è né onesto né profondo sminuire, dimenticare o tacere il piacere di uccidere (garantito intatto dalla ritualizzazione dell’uccidere) se non si conosce alcuna ragione per cui sia *assolutamente e comunque* ingiusto uccidere l’uomo. (88)

(Given that the rituality of the killing *always* enables the sacrificer to reacquire his innocence, Sade insists in underlining the complete and absolute arbitrariness, gratuitousness and ‘reasonably’ unmotivated character of all the laws that inflict death upon men [...] In a much deeper way, and with a lot more frankness than Robespierre and Joseph de Maistre, Sade explicitly affirmed that it is not honest, nor profound to diminish, forget or dismiss the

pleasure of killing (fully granted by its rituality) if one does not know in the first place why killing a man must *always* and *in every case* be considered unjust.)

The solution offered by Jesi to such a disturbing question is, apparently, a paradoxical one. According to him, in fact, killing instantly unleashes the justness of the killed: “La proposizione ‘egli fu giusto poiché fu ucciso’ diviene una sorta di risposta, atemporalmente valida, alla domanda ‘perché è un delitto uccidere un uomo?’ Da essa ne consegue, infatti, l’epifania delle virtù [*l’aretè* greca] nella vittima di qualsiasi uccisione, sia assassinio ‘criminoso’ o esecuzione capitale, o azione di guerra” (90; “The proposition ‘he was just because he was killed’ functions as a reply, timeless in its validity, to the question ‘why is it a crime to kill a man?’ From it, in fact, derives the epiphany of the virtue [the Greek *areté*] of the victim in any killing whatsoever, be it ‘criminal’ homicide, capital punishment or war action”).³⁸ Translated in Deleuzian terms, we could say that every killing is an act of power (*pouvoir*), an absolute and authoritarian act of power that cuts itself off, once and for all, from the infinite chain of possible worlds, that is, it forecloses the intrinsic *puissance*—or virtue-ality, the Greek *areté*—of the Other. As Deleuze has amply demonstrated, the Other is the structure of the possible: “When one complains about the meanness of Others, one forgets [an]other and even more frightening meanness—namely, the meanness of things were there no Others” (*Michel* 306).

With its ability to break through every camp-thinking attitude, both at a personal and at a collective level, and its capacity, in the end, to fully accept the Other as “a possible world” (Deleuze, *Michel* 306), Cesare Pavese’s 1949 novel *The House on the Hill* traces the

³⁸ Jesi’s specific reference here is to the figure of Hermeias, the Greek philosopher crucified by the Persians in 342 B.C. for not having revealed his secret plans with king Philip of Macedonia and placed by Aristotle at the center of his famous *Hymn to Areté*.

progressive “awakening” of a self-centered man to an open-ended interpretation of the real, by passing through the looking-glass of his encounter with the half-orphaned Dino, against the tragic backdrop of WWII in Northern Italy. As we will see, the final ethical standpoint of the novel will be a powerful appeal to acknowledge the intrinsic *puissance* always already embedded in the Other by willfully humanizing even the “wholly-Other,” that is, the dead enemy. Thanks to the intrinsically subversive liminality of the Orphan-child mythologem, embodied here by Dino’s character, the protagonist Corrado will eventually learn to overcome all camp-thinking attitude by realizing that, ethically speaking, it should make no difference at all whether Dino is actually his son or not, just like it should make no difference at all whether the corpses that lie in the woods belong to dead partisans or *repubblichini*, insofar as “ogni caduto somiglia a chi resta e gliene chiede ragione” (122; “every man who falls resembles the one who survives and calls him into account” 191).³⁹

Written between the last months of 1947 and the beginning of 1948 and then published at the end of that same year together with the short novel *Il carcere* (The Prison), under the common title of *Prima che il gallo canti* (Before the Cock Crows), the novel presents itself, in the words of the first-person narrator, as “[la] storia di una lunga illusione” (4; “[the] story of a protracted illusion” 6), namely, the idea that the Other as such does not concern us and that we can actually seek refuge in the past in order to avoid adult decisions and responsibilities. In the course of about eighteen eventful and dramatic months, from the summer of 1943 to the winter of 1944, the perfectly encamped life of Corrado, an egotistic, cowardly, and cynical intellectual, who lives willfully secluded in a rented room on the hills overlooking the city of Turin, will be completely unsettled by the initial chance encounter

³⁹ Page references are to the Einaudi Tascabili edition (Torino: Einaudi, 1990) for the original Italian version and to the Walker & Co. edition (New York: Walker & Co., 1961) for the English translation.

with Cate, a woman with whom he had been briefly involved ten years before and who may (or may not) have begot him a son, Dino, without his knowing it.⁴⁰

What the half-orphaned Dino will end up putting into question with his sheer presence is precisely Corrado's attitude towards the Other, a way of looking at reality that predates the war itself, as acknowledged by Corrado himself in the very first chapter:

[...] la colpa di quel che mi accadde non va data alla guerra. Anzi la guerra, ne sono certo, potrebbe ancora salvarmi. [...] La guerra mi tolse soltanto l'estremo scrupolo di starmene solo. [...] Con la guerra divenne legittimo chiudersi in sé, vivere alla giornata, non rimpiangere più le occasioni perdute. Ma si direbbe che io l'attendessi da tempo e ci contassi, una guerra così insolita e vasta che, con poca fatica, si poteva accucciarsi e lasciarla infuriare, sul cielo delle città, rincasando in collina. (4)

[...] the War cannot be held responsible for what befell me. The War, I am convinced, might still be my salvation. [...] All the War did was to remove the last scruple I had about living alone [...] The war justified living from day to day without any regret for lost opportunities. But it was as if I had been waiting for the war a long time and had been counting on it; a war on such a vast and unprecedented scale that it was easy enough to go back home to the hills, curl up and let it blaze away in the sky above the city' (6).

The war itself is thus a frame-of-mind, a mental landscape, initially opposed to the one represented by the hill, as the opening lines of the novel readily reveal to us: "Già in altri tempi si diceva collina come avremmo detto il mare o la boscaglia. Ci tornavo la sera, dalla città, e per me non era un luogo tra gli altri, ma un aspetto delle cose, un modo di vivere" (3; "Even in the old days we referred to the 'hills' as we might have talked about the sea or the woods. I used to go back there in the evenings from the town when it grew dusk, and for me it was not simply a place like any other; it represented an aspect of things, a way of life" 5). In this perspective, the title itself, *The House on The Hill*, reflects the illusionary idea of a

⁴⁰ These same characters had already appeared in Pavese's 1941 short-story *La famiglia*, albeit in a completely different context, insofar as there were no references whatsoever to the war.

place both physically and metaphorically separated from everything else, a secluded spot, where to seek refuge from the outside world.

At first, Corrado seems to cherish very much his solitude and disengagement: “[...] per me, ero contento di non avere nei miei giorni un vero affetto né un impaccio, di essere solo, non legato con nessuno” (6; “[...] as far as I was concerned, I was content to be alone, free from ties with anyone” 10). At the same time, though, a few paragraphs before, he has already revealed his inner need to find someone with whom to share his experiences:

“Cominciavo a quei tempi a compiacermi in ricordi d’infanzia. Si direbbe che sotto ai rancori e alle incertezze, sotto alla voglia di star solo, mi scoprivo ragazzo per avere un compagno, un collega, un figliolo”. (5; “It was at this time that I began to find pleasure in childhood memories. It was as if beneath all the disillusionment and uncertainty and my desire to be alone, I was rediscovering myself as a boy in order to provide myself with a companion, a colleague, a little son” 9). The rest of the novel can be read as the progressive fulfillment of this need on Corrado’s part: an attempt to open himself up to the *puissance* of the Other, conceived as a possible new world, both at a personal and at a collective level.

As far as the *fabula* is concerned, it is not by chance that this complex story of a gradual “awakening” starts with the protagonist being drawn to a tavern by a festive “brusio di voci frammisto di canti” (5; “buzz of voices mingled with snatches of songs” 9) overheard in the middle of the night. As noted by Jesi in *Letteratura e mito*, the feast is a recurrent leitmotiv in Pavese’s narrative, insofar as it represents an attempt on his part to obtain a “rigenerazione del tempo storico attraverso il ripristino festivo del tempo del mito” (163; “regeneration of historical time through the reestablishing of myth’s festive time”), a time characterized precisely by “quell’essere desti insieme” (164; “being awake together”), which

in the ancient world was in and of itself a festive condition, a moment of trans-individual connectedness, opposed to the state of sleepiness of subjectivity.

Such reading of the opening chapter, in my view, is perfectly in line with Pavese's "preference for the aura of simbolicity and timelessness over the limitations of time and space" (135) justly identified by Gregory Lucente as one of the main traits of Pavese's narrative as a whole, together with his "realism's strategic dependence on myth" (135). According to Lucente, in fact, "Pavese saw [...] the continuing desacralization and the progressive disruption of the human community in the modern world" (135). In this sense, the *House on the Hill* can indeed be read as a gradual attempt to break away from such desacralization so as to finally awake in/to a genuinely open-ended community, by actively overcoming the false dichotomies around which Corrado's life has structured itself, up until then: hill vs. city, past vs. present, nature vs. culture, disengagement vs. engagement, etc...⁴¹

At the beginning of the novel, Corrado is totally unwilling to act and/or unable to establish any type of genuine relation with the Other, as Cate readily points out to him: "[...] per te siamo tutti ragazzi [...] siamo come il tuo cane" (28; "we're all boys as far as you're concerned [...] Just like your dog" 45). He is quite literally blind or asleep, as he himself acknowledges soon after: "Ogni volta più cieco, ero stato. Un mese mi c'era voluto per capire che Dino vuol dire Corrado. Com'era la faccia di Dino? Chiudevo gli occhi e non riuscivo a rivederla" (29; "On each occasion I had been blinder than before. It had taken me a month to tumble to the fact that 'Dino' was a curtailed diminutive for Corrado. What was

⁴¹ After all, as noted by Jesi, "La poetica di Pavese [...] è innanzitutto la teorizzazione morale della necessità di agire e di vivere anche se la città è sconsecrata e i tesori della campagna non sono più accessibili" (*Letteratura* 169) 'Pavese's poetics [...] is above all the ethical theorization of the necessity to act and to live even if the city is deconsecrated and the treasures of the countryside have become inaccessible'.

Dino's face like? I closed my eyes but was unable to conjure it up" 47). More in general, his very first encounter with the Other at *Le Fontane* had been just as symbolically blinded by the darkness of an air-raid alarm, in which voices without a face "andavano e venivano al buio" (7; "were moving to and fro in the dark" 11), like shadows in a dream, preventing him from recognizing at first even Cate, his long-lost girlfriend from ten years before.

Hence, Corrado's progressive awakening in the novel will proceed along two parallel lines: on the one side, there is the personal dimension represented by Dino and Cate, on the other, the collective dimension represented by the war itself. But in both cases, what Corrado will have to deal with is actually his hard-to-die-out refusal to accept the Other as "a possible world" (Deleuze *Michel* 306). Given such premises, it is not surprising that, in both cases, his first reaction at being awakened--either to Dino's existence or to the war itself--is actually a reaction of physical refusal, of nausea: when he realizes that Dino might be his son, "M'incamminai con un senso di nausea" (29; "I walked along feeling sick" 47), as well as later on in the novel, when he personally witnesses the Nazi roundup at *Le Fontane*: "Provai come un senso di nausea, di gelo" (85; "I felt a kind of nausea, a chill" 133).

As we have seen, Corrado is initially totally oblivious to the war: "Si aspetta sempre che la guerra ci bruci per svegliarci" (24; "People always wait until they burn their own fingers before they wake up" 39) and a few pages later, he adds: "cosa t'importa la guerra, cos'importa il sangue--pensavo--con questo cielo tra le piante? Si poteva arrivare correndo, buttarsi nell'erba, giocare alla caccia o agli agguati. Così vivevano le bisce, le lepri, i ragazzi" (33; "what did the war matter, I thought, what did the bloodshed matter with this sky behind trees? One could dash around, fling oneself down in the grass, play hunting, ambushes. That was how snakes, hares and boys lived" 52). He is thus affected by what he

himself defines as “[la] mia strana immunità tra le cose” (35; “my strange immunity in the midst of all this” 56), to the extent that, even after July 25th 1943, when Mussolini is finally overthrown, Corrado refuses to take part in the festive celebrations that follow: “restai lassù non perché avessi paura di qualche pallottola (era peggio un allarme), ma perché prevedevo entusiasmi, cortei, discussioni sfegatate” (37; “I stayed there, not because I was afraid of a few bullets (the danger was less than during an air-raid) but because I anticipated demonstrations, processions, vociferous discussions” 58).

Deep down, though, Corrado knows all too well that the war is not over yet. On the contrary, “comincia adesso” (36; “it’s just beginning now” 57), insofar as the old world “non l’avevano schiacciato gli avversari, s’era ucciso da sé. Ma c’è qualcuno che si uccida per sparire davvero?” (47; “the old world had not been crushed by its enemies but had killed itself. But does anyone ever commit suicide merely to disappear?” 74). If Cate is under the illusion that everything will actually change, “sembra di nascere quest’oggi, di guarire” (45; “it is as if life had just begun today and we are healed” 71), Corrado knows better and finds himself musing for the first time on that fact that war can virtually affect everybody: “prima che l’estate finisca, quanti di noi saranno a terra? [...] Toccherà a quel biondino. Toccherà a quel tranviere. A quella donna. Al giornalista. A quel cane” (39; “before summer is over, how many of us will be still in this world? [...] It may be this fair-haired boy’s turn next, that tram-conductor’s, that woman’s, that newspaper vendor’s, that dog’s” 62).

Now, what is interesting to note here is that this small but significant change in Corrado’s attitude towards the outside world is initially triggered by Dino’s presence, whose function in the novel is precisely that of wrenching him away from his solipsistic cocoon and awake him--as well as the readers--to a new way of looking at reality: “Da quel momento la

mia vita rovinava. Ero come in un rifugio quando le volte traballano” (29; “My life seemed to be tumbling about me in ruins. It was like being in the air-raid shelter when the roof shook” 47). Interestingly enough, the very first description of Dino offered by Corrado portrays him as a ghost-like presence, somewhat resembling the Latin *larva*, that is, the half-Other, the non-dead that awakens, associated by Giorgio Agamben to every child figure as such because of the profound “instability of the signifier” (*Infancy* 91) that characterizes both: “Mi guardava esitante. Era un bianco ragazzo [...] La prima sera non l’avevo notato” (20; “He looked at me rather doubtfully. He was a very pale kid [...] I had not noticed him on the first night” 31). Dino is thus a slightly disquieting figure that lingers at first on the threshold between two worlds.

More in general, as the story progresses, the subtle mythological overtones of this Orphan-child become more evident. After all, we must not forget that by the time Pavese was writing *The House on the Hill*, he had become very familiar with Kerényi’s 1942 essay *The Primordial Child in Primordial Times*, whose publication in Italian translation had been strongly advocated by Pavese himself, in his capacity as editor in chief of the Turin-based publishing house Einaudi. In a way, Dino can be interpreted as the literary adaptation of Kerényi’s theories on the Orphan-child mythologem and it is not by chance that, later in the novel, he acquires almost the god-like features of the divine child per excellence: Hermes. “Dino arrivò col suo bastone, zuffolando, preceduto da Belbo [...] aveva capito da solo che lo aspettavo” (33; “Dino arrived with his stick, whistling, preceded by Belbo [...] he had realized I was waiting for him” 52). Here the words “bastone” (stick) and “zuffolare” (from “zuffolo”, a type of pan flute) both belong to the mythological imagery of Hermes, the playful, child-like, messenger of the gods, patron--amongst other things--of the boundaries and of the

travelers who cross them, as well as interpreter capable of bridging the boundaries with strangers, which is precisely the function carried out by Dino's character within the novel.

Consequently, thanks to Dino's intrinsically subversive and liminal perspective, Corrado will start to read and interpret reality differently, especially as far as the concept of the family is concerned. When asked about his father's identity, for instance, Dino's reaction is quite disconcerting to Corrado: "Mi guardò fiducioso e impaziente. Era chiaro che non ci aveva mai pensato. [...] 'Sono orfano, io'" (34; "he looked at me confidently but with impatience. It was evident that he had never given the matter a thought. [...] 'I'm an orphan'" 54). This is per se just a statement, rather than a Just one, but it is actually very powerful in forcing Corrado to realize that the boy had never even thought about his father in terms of the traditional Bourgeois family.

Corrado is indeed on the verge of entering a new world, a new frame-of-mind, insofar as, by acknowledging Dino's Orphan-child perspective, he starts to question his own attitude of refusal towards the Other: "C'era la fine della guerra, c'era Dino. Per minaccioso che fosse l'imminente avvenire, il mondo vecchio traballava, e la mia vita era tutta impostata su quel mondo, sul terrore e rancore e disgusto che quel mondo incuteva. Adesso avevo quarant'anni e c'era Cate, c'era Dino. Non contava di chi fosse davvero figlio (40; "There was the end of the war, there was Dino. Threatening though the immediate outlook was, the old world was still rocking and it was on that and the terror and bitterness that such a world inspired that my life was founded. I was now forty years old and there was Cate and there was Dino. It did not matter really whose son it was" 63). Hence, paternity as such, conceivable here as one of the strongholds of both Bourgeois and Fascist camp-thinking, as

well as one of Corrados' initial obsessions, is finally being replaced by a more inclusive concept of open-ended community.

What is interesting to note here is that both Cate and Dino want to be fully recognized as possible worlds, without falling back though into the traps of the falsely "serene" microcosm of the Bourgeois family, whose stereotyped roles are here fully subverted. Cate, for instance, is not at all in search of a ring to settle down: "Che cosa t'importa se Dino è tuo figlio? Se fosse tuo figlio mi vorresti sposare. Ma non ci si sposa per questo. Anche me vuoi sposarmi per liberarti di qualcosa. Non pensarci" (44; "What does it matter to you whether Dino is your son or not? If he were your son, you would want to marry me. But one cannot marry just for that. The same with me, you want to marry me to work something off. You mustn't think of it" 70). Analogously, Dino will become weary of Corrado as soon as he starts acting like a traditional father figure: "se adesso Dino mi accetta senza molto entusiasmo, era perché gli stavo troppo alle costole, perché mi facevo suo padre" (48; "Dino accepted my company now without much enthusiasm, no doubt I was too much at his elbows, too much *in loco parenti*" 76).

Although Dino is initially perceived by Corrado as something incomprehensible and mysterious, "grumo oscuro d'un chiuso avvenire" (53; "the dark seed of an uncertain future" 83), he will actually turn out to be the arbiter of his metamorphosis, to use Jesi's insightful definition of the Orphan-child mythologem analyzed in chapter one. It is, in fact, thanks to Dino's presence that Corrado starts putting into question his own disengagement: "Capii d'un tratto quanto fosse sciocco e futile quel mio compiacermi dei boschi, quell'orgoglio dei boschi che nemmeno con Dino smettevo. Sotto il cielo d'estate impietrito dall'ululo, capii che avevo sempre giocato come un ragazzo irresponsabile. [...] Se Cate morisse, pensavo,

chi pensa a suo figlio?” (55; “I suddenly realized how stupid and futile the contentment I had felt in the woods was, my pride in the woods that continued even when I was with Dino. It struck me under that summer sky filled with hideous noises that I had always played around like an irresponsible boy. [...] If Cate were to die, I thought, who would give a thought to her son?” 87).

Hence, in the midst of the confusion and the destruction brought by Italy’s peace signing on September 8th 1943, a new need arises spontaneously within Corrado: “Il finimondo sempre atteso era arrivato. [Eppure] m’aveva preso una speranza, una curiosità affannosa: sopravvivere al crollo, fare in tempo a conoscere il mondo di dopo” (62; “The ever-threatening catastrophe had come about. [Yet] I was possessed by a kind of weary curiosity: I wanted to survive the collapse and be there to know the world that would follow” 98). At first, Dino may still appear to him like a distant Other, “parte del mondo stravolto [...] chiuso, inafferrabile” (65; “part of the topsy-turvy world [...] taciturn and evasive” 103), but he is actually the one who will gradually open Corrado’s eyes to the reality of the war: “Di punto in bianco lui smetteva la lezione e usciva a raccontare delle ultime voci, di quel che aveva detto un viandante, dei tedeschi, dei patrioti alla macchia. Sapeva già le prime storie di colpi inverosimili, di beffe, di spie giustiziate” (69; “He would break off without warning and digress about the latest rumours, something a passer-by had told him about Germans or partisans in the maquis. He already knew the first stories to come in, of amazing surprise attacks, acts of provocation, spies being shot” 108-9).

If war had initially appeared through Dino’s eyes as a game, a sort of treasure hunt: “Era stato e vedere le bombe cadute. Sapeva tutto dei motori e dei tipi, e in casa aveva tre spezzoni. Mi chiese se sul campo di battaglia il giorno dopo si possono raccogliere

pallottole.” (27; “He had been to see where bombs had fallen. He knew all the different types of airplane engine and make. He had three old bomb-sticks at home. He asked me if it were possible to collect rifle-bullets the day after a battle” 43); now it becomes the real thing: “Dino mi raccontò che in città era stato a vedere il marciapiede dove avevano fucilato tre patrioti; c’erano ancora le macchie di sangue” (76; “Dino told me he had been into the town to see the pavement on which they had shot three patriots; the splashes of blood were still there” 120).

As a direct consequence, the more Corrado experiences the war through Dino’s eyes, the more he feels guilty for his own disengagement, especially after seeking refuge in the boarding school in the outskirts of Turin, once Cate and her friends have been arrested: “A Cate, a Nando, a tutti gli altri non osavo pensare, quasi per darmi un attestato d’innocenza [...] ero entrato nel collegio. [...] giurai, se potevo, di non uscirne mai più (88-89; “I dared not think about Cate, Nando and all the others, as if by excluding them from my thoughts I was giving a proof of my innocence [...] I found my way into the College [...] I vowed that, if it were possible, I would never leave the place” 139-140). In a way, nothing has changed for Corrado, insofar as both the hill and the boarding school function in the novel as a “letargo” (“dormancy”), an “anestetico” (“anaesthetic”), a place where he can be cozily hidden away: “Non chiedevo la pace del mondo, chiedevo la mia” (91; “I did not ask for the peace of the world--I asked for my own” 142).

Given such premises, the powerful double-sided figure of crisis and renewal represented by the now-completely-orphaned figure of Dino cannot appear now but overwhelming and even threatening to him: “Dino poteva far da pista e tradirmi, e l’idea che ormai fosse solo al mondo non riuscivo a pensarla, mi pigliava sprovvisto” (94; “Dino might

give me away and I couldn't somehow realize that he was really alone in the world" 147).⁴² But it is precisely at this moment that the long-awaited metamorphosis of the protagonist finally occurs: as soon as Corrado finds out that Dino has fled the boarding school, consciously turning his back once and for all on everything it represents, so as to join the partisans up in the mountains, his gesture acquires in Corrado's eyes the sense of an ethical refusal that starts to haunt him more and more like a Derridian ghost: "Pensavo a Dino dappertutto. [...] Dov'era andato lo sapevo. Lo sapevo da un pezzo" (99-100; "I thought of Dino everywhere I went [...] I knew where he had gone. I had know it some time" 155-6) and a few paragraphs later: "[...] ma in quel silenzio, in quella pace, non pensavo che a Dino. Mancava da quasi un mese, e ci soffrivo al punto che, se avessi saputo come, sarei partito a cercarlo" (101; "[...] but in that silence, that tranquility, all my thoughts were of Dino. He had gone nearly a month, and I was so worried that if I had known how to set about it, I would have started out to look for him" 157).

As a matter of fact, Corrado will never see Dino again, but his legacy will be long-lasting: "Dino era un grumo di ricordi che accettavo, che volevo, lui solo poteva salvarmi, e non gli ero bastato" (102; "Dino represented a host of memories that I accepted and wanted; he alone could save me, but I had not been enough for him" 158). What I want to point out here is that the traditional family roles have been now completely reversed. It is not the adult that saves the child, but it's the other way round: it's now Corrado that seeks his salvation through the powerful mythologem of the Orphan-child.

⁴² It is interesting to remark here that the title of the collection in which *The House on the Hill* first appeared in 1949 was *Before the Cock Crows*, an overt reference to Peter's betrayal of Christ. As we have seen, the theme of betraying the Other in order to save oneself is indeed at the core of Pavese's thought-provoking novel.

In analyzing Dino's evolution as a character within the plot of the novel, O'Healy has rightly noted that "in a child of seven or eight, Dino's sense of commitment seems utterly implausible. His actions are the symbolic projection of what the adult Corrado, trapped in his intimate quest for the past, is unable or unwilling to carry out" (125). This is undoubtedly true, Dino is far more than the simple curtailed diminutive of Corrado: he is his alter ego and savior. But in my view, if Dinos's actions appear implausible it's simply because he is by no means an ordinary and/or naturalistic child figure to start with. He is, as we have seen, the incarnation of the quintessential Orphan-child mythologem, capable of disrupting the surrounding world, while opening it up to new possibilities.

At the end of the novel, everything may still look the same, if seen from the outset: "Niente è accaduto. Sono a casa da sei mesi, e la guerra continua" (120; "Nothing has happened. I have been home six months now and the war still goes on" 188), but Corrado's attitude has changed completely, as his final admission readily shows: "ho vissuto un solo lungo isolamento, una futile vacanza, come un ragazzo che giocando a nascondersi entra dentro un cespuglio e ci sta bene, guarda il cielo da sotto le foglie, e si dimentica di uscire mai più" (121; "I have lived a life of prolonged isolation, a kind of futile holiday; I have been like a boy who in the middle of a game of hide-and-seek plunges into a thicket, finds it good there, losing himself in the contemplation of the sky between the foliage, and forgets to come out again" 191). What Corrado has learnt at his own expenses is that war leaves no way out, not even in the idealized hills of his infancy: "Questa guerra [...] ci caccia come lepri di rifugio in rifugio. Finirà per costringerci a combattere anche noi, per strapparci un consenso attivo. E verrà il giorno che nessuno sarà fuori dalla guerra. [...] Tutti avremo accettato di fare la guerra. E allora forse avremo la pace" (120-21; "This war [...] drives us from one

hiding-place to the next like so many hunted hares. In the end it will force us to fight too, extorting an active consent from us. And the day will come when no one will be outside the war [...] We must all consent to take part in the war and then perhaps we shall have peace” (189).

According to Jesi, in order to reestablish pure connections with the past, so as to acquire from its genuine sources of creation, it is imperative to “rifiutare le tendenze colpevoli della civiltà cui si appartiene ed infrangerne i limiti” (*Germania* 35; “refuse the guilty tendencies of one’s own civilization and shatter its boundaries”), and this is precisely what Corrado will learn by waking up not to an encamped political ideology—be it left-wing or right-wing—but to a truly open-ended community, in what Paul Gilroy would call “an exercise in strategic universalism” (96), capable of overcoming every camp-thinking attitude as such, both at a personal and at a collective level. If at the beginning of the novel Corrado was under the illusion that “soltanto nei boschi nulla mutava, e dove un corpo era caduto riaffioravano radici” (33; “only in the woods there was no stir and where a body had fallen, roots were springing up again” 52), he now recognizes that same fallen corpse as a full-blown human being, capable of interrogating him--as well as us readers--with his sheer presence, just like Dino.

Ma ho visto i morti sconosciuti, i morti repubblicini. Sono questi che mi hanno svegliato. Se un ignoto, un nemico, diventa morendo una cosa simile, se ci si arresta e si ha paura a scavalcarlo, vuol dire che anche vinto il nemico è qualcuno, che dopo averne sparso il sangue bisogna placarlo, dare una voce a questo sangue, giustificare chi l’ha sparso. Guardare certi morti è umiliante. Non sono più faccenda altrui; non ci si sente capitati sul posto per caso. Si ha l’impressione che lo stesso destino che ha messo a terra quei corpi, tenga noi altri inchiodati a vederli, a riempircene gli occhi. Non è paura, non è la solita viltà. Ci si sente umiliati perché si capisce--si tocca con gli occhi--che al posto del morto potremmo essere noi: non ci sarebbe differenza, e se viviamo

lo dobbiamo al cadavere imbrattato. Per questo ogni guerra è una guerra civile: ogni caduto somiglia a chi resta, e gliene chiede ragione (122)

But I have looked on dead who are unknown to me, the dead of the Republic. It was seeing them that awakened me. If a stranger, an enemy, becomes by dying something similar, if one stops and is afraid to stride over his body, it means that even conquered, the enemy is still a human being, that having shed his blood, we must placate it, lend it a voice, justify whoever has spilt it. Looking at corpses is humiliating. They are not other people's concern; we cannot but feel we have just chanced to be at that spot. We have the impression that the same fate which had stretched these bodies on the ground, nails us here to look at them, to fill our eyes with the sight of them. It is not fear, nor common cowardice. It is humiliation. We learn through our eyes that it might well be ourselves in the place of these dead and it would be no different and that if we are alive, we owe it to this sullied corpse. Because every war is a civil war; every man who falls resembles the one who survives and calls him to account. (191)

If it's true that Corrado awakens thanks to his eye-opening encounter with the liminal figure of the Orphan-child mythologem--whose "instability" as a signifier is at first too disquieting and/or challenging for him to accept--the actual accomplishment of such awakening, on Corrado's part, will be to fully acknowledge the intrinsic virtue--the Greek *areté*--not only of the half-Other (Dino), but also and foremost of the wholly-Other (the dead enemy), making the two almost indiscernible from one another, like is a Deleuzian crystal-image. As Derrida once wrote: "The wholly other--and the dead person is the wholly other--watches me, concerns me, and concerns or watches me while addressing me, without however answering me, a prayer or an injunction, an infinite demand, which becomes the law for me: it concerns me at the same time that it exceeds me infinitely and universally, without my being able to exchange a glance with him or with her" (*Echographies* 121). Translated in Deleuzian terms, we could say that the Other, even when dead, still represents--perhaps even more so--a possible world, that confounds all of our accepted and well-established precepts and interpretations of the real, a ghost that can function as "arbiter of metamorphosis" just

like the Orphan-child mythologem, as the powerfully open-ended closing of the novel consciously implies: “Ora che ho visto cos’è guerra, cos’è guerra civile, so che tutti, se un giorno finisse, dovrebbero chiedersi: E dei caduti che facciamo? Perché sono morti? Io non saprei cosa rispondere. Non adesso, almeno. Né mi pare che gli altri lo sappiano. Forse lo sanno unicamente i morti, e soltanto per loro la guerra è finita davvero” (122-23; “Now that I have seen what war, civil war is, I know that if it should finish one day, everybody will have to ask himself this question, ‘And what about those who have fallen?’ What do we do about them? Why are they dead?’ I would not know what reply to make. Not at present anyway. Nor does it seem to me that anyone else knows either. Perhaps only the dead know and only for them is the war really over” 192).

CONCLUSION

The Italian Neorealist Experience of the 1940s: Beyond Camps

In analyzing the mythologem of the Orphan-child in *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, Karoly Kerényi has justly argued that “Mythology is never the biography of the gods” (25), insofar as the stories that deal with the infancy of the gods portray the divinities in question as being already in full power of their prodigious skills and abilities, thus excluding the “biographical” approach that tends to consider each age as a specific phase of an “evolution.” The young Herakles, for instance, already possesses all of his courage and strength, just like the young Apollo is already capable of fighting back the Titans. Hence, the image of the prodigious child and the image of the grown-up god are two realities that run parallel to each other and that appear to be often indiscernible from one another: two *agalmas* in which the virtual becomes actual and the actual becomes virtual--just like in the Deleuzian crystal-image--to the extent that “the richness of life and meaning in the wonder-working child is no whit smaller than in the bearded god. On the contrary, it seems to be even richer and more profoundly moving” (*Essays* 49).

Drawing on this insightful assumption, Furio Jesi has acutely noted that in nineteenth, and early twentieth-century German Bourgeois literature, on the contrary, the eternal infant of mythology has been replaced by a child who always represents the actual past of a specific biography and who will eventually develop into a specific identity:

Knulp, Emil Sinclair, Tonio Kröger, Adrian Leverkühn o Felix Krull [...] In essi la cultura borghese si apre all'evocazione del divino fanciullo, nei limiti che le sono propri. Tali limiti, dai quali dipende un'alterazione della genuinità della realtà mitica, sono appunto manifesti nella struttura biografica entro la

quale l'immagine del fanciullo è stata sistematicamente inserita; e proprio nella violenza fatta alla natura mitica del divino fanciullo si percepisce la frattura o l'alterazione subita dal tempo mitico delle origini, divenuto passato personale in quelle strutture biografiche (*Germania* 210-211)

“Knulp, Emil Sinclair, Tonio Kröger, Adrian Leverkühn o Felix Krull [...] In all of them, bourgeois culture opens itself to the evocation of the divine child, within its own limits. Such limits, that bring about an alteration of the genuineness of the mythical reality, manifest themselves precisely in the biographical structure in which the image of the child has been systematically inserted; and it is precisely in this violence towards the mythical nature of the divine child that one perceives the fracture or the alteration suffered by the mythical time of the origins, which has become personal past in those biographical structures.”

Interestingly enough, what Jesi writes in reference to the technicization of child-figures within German literature may well apply--even more so!--to many *orphan*-figures that populate nineteenth-century Bourgeois literature as a whole, from Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *David Copperfield* (1849) to Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876); from the French play *The Two Orphans* (1874) by Adolphe d'Ennery and Eugène Cormon to Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), just to cite a few. At the end of each of these works, the orphan-child protagonist is always happily reintegrated in the “serene” order from which he or she had been excluded in the first place.⁴³

The initial, disquieting, “instability of the signifier” (Agamben *Infancy* 91), represented by

⁴³ As Jesi goes on to specify: “Accogliere l'immagine alterata del fanciullo divino entro una vicenda biografica [...] attesta la simpatia per la memoria che è simpatia per il passato [...] Aprire il proprio passato o il passato della propria gente alle immagini del mito, alterandole però in modo da assoggettarle strettamente a una caratterizzazione personale, è un modo di ‘valorizzare’ il passato, o meglio di riconoscergli un particolare valore e fascino, senza trasformarlo in eterno presente. È un sintomo del desiderio di avere un passato che sia veramente tale e insieme carico di un valore di cui sembra privo il presente” (*Germania* 211) ‘To insert the altered image of the divine child within a biographic vicissitude [...] demonstrates an attraction for memory that is also an attraction for the past [...] To open one's past or the past of one's people to the images of myth, while altering them so as to subjugate them to a strictly personal characterization, is a way to ‘enhance’ the past, or rather to recognize in it a specific value and fascination, without transforming it in eternal present. It's a symptom of the desire to have a past that should be really as such, but also filled with a value that seems to be lacking in the present’.

the intrinsic subversiveness and liminality of the genuine Orphan-child mythologem, appears to be gradually subdued in the course of the plot, as we follow the protagonist's progress through the world, right until he or she is graciously--or fortuitously--granted full access to the encamped microcosms of the family, the city, the nation.

What I sought to argue here is that such linear and falsely reassuring progression of the Orphan-child's fate tends to transform the traditional nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* into a quintessentially "Bourgeois" genre, insofar as it forecloses the creation of radically new concepts by relying entirely on Just ideas. Thus, at the end of these works--and the same could be said about Carmine Gallone's 1942 screen adaptation of *The Two Orphans*--we simply see reaffirmed the well-established precepts and values of the Bourgeoisie and nothing new is invented. Surely enough, instead of recognizing and cherishing the *puissance* for renewal always already embedded in the Orphan-child's perspective, this "foreclosure of creation"--as I would like to call it--represents a missed opportunity for a profound re-creation and a missed encounter with the Other as "a possible world" (Deleuze, *Michel* 306), which eventually leads only to the reconstitution of everyday Bourgeois life.⁴⁴

Conversely, what distinguishes the *bildung* of the Orphan-child portrayed within the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s is the fact that he is never actually reintegrated in the surrounding, encamped microcosm, thus embodying a quintessential Otherness, capable

⁴⁴ Interestingly enough, what Jesi identifies as the Bourgeois approach to memory, differs completely from the Neorealist way of relating to past, present, and future: "[...] cedendo al fascino di una memoria aperta al mito--seppure al mito alterato--il borghese [ha] potuto soddisfare il proprio stimolo a 'essere artista' e dunque ad osservare la propria decadenza: soddisfazione ovviamente non conseguibile con un atteggiamento volto al presente e al futuro" (Germania 212; "[...] by yielding to the fascination of a memory open to myth--albeit an altered myth--the Bourgeois [has been] able to satisfy his own drive to 'be an artist' and so to contemplate its own decadence: a satisfaction that is obviously unattainable through an attitude addressed at the present or the future.")

of undermining every closed interpretation of the real. If--in Derrida's words--the child is indeed "the primal figure of the absolute *arrivant*" (*Echographies* 20), then we shouldn't offer him any contract or impose any conditions upon him: "The *arrivant* must be absolutely other, an other that I expect not to be expecting, [...] an expectation without what in philosophy is called a horizon of expectation, when a certain knowledge still anticipates and amortizes in advance" (13).

As we have seen, the ethical function of the Orphan-child mythologem in all the films and novels analyzed in the previous two chapters is precisely that of disrupting or opening up to new possibilities the encamped reality that surrounds him. The protagonist may not "fit in" right from the beginning, like in *The Path to The Spiders' Nests* and in *Miracle in Milan*, or may become gradually estranged from his context as in *The Children Are Watching Us* and in *Agostino*. But in each one of these works the traditional development of the *Bildungsroman* is reversed in what could be defined as an "*anti-Bildungsroman* approach": a difficult--sometimes painful--eye-opening experience, at the end of which the protagonist always willfully decides to turn his back, either physically or metaphorically, on the surrounding world.

Moreover, in all of the examples I have analyzed in the course of this study the actual ending is always left open, in perfect correspondence to the open-ended interpretation of the real advocated by these works of art. As noted by Gambettini, it is as if these directors and writers purposely wanted to avoid any type of closure, "lasciando aperto 'il giorno dopo', lasciando piuttosto, come diceva Zavattini, dopo l'analisi, la riflessione" (51; "leaving 'the next day' open-ended, or rather, as Zavattini used to say, leave the reflection after the analysis"). What the Orphan-child does in all of these films and novels is to actively fight

against clichés, automatic responses, habits and the supposedly self-evident truths of camp-thinking, by challenging audiences and readerships to rethink and question, at various levels, the inherited and commonsensical conceptions of the world, as well as its fictional representations. In a way, we could say that in the Italian Neorealist experiencing of the world, the infant re-becomes indeed “la pura immagine del mito” (Germania 212; “the pure image of myth”), to use Jesi’s expression: an un-technicized genuine mythologem, with all of its powerful *puissance* to open up every camp-thinking attitude a such. And this is true, as we have seen, of many of the strongholds of the Bourgeois and/or Fascist frame-of-mind, be it at the level of the family (*The Children Are Watching Us* and *Agostino*), the city (*Open City* and *Miracle in Milan*) or the community at large (*The Path to The Spiders’ Nests* and *The House on the Hill*).

Overall, the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s can be conceived as the result of a specific geo-historical moment, an instance of profound “deterritorialization,” in which people found themselves de-linked from their home, their birthplace, their fatherland, their heritage, as expressed by the recurrent mythologem of the Orphan-child. In this sense, the disrupted socio-economic landscape of Italian cities in the 1940s gave birth to a specific mental space, opening up a new horizon of experience while attempting to de-colonize the mind from the Fascist cultural ideology. Hence, as noted in chapter one, the mythological dimension of Italian Neorealism appears indeed as an attempt to awake into an open-ended community, after the state of sleepiness of totalitarianism.

Translated in Deleuzian terms, we could say that if Bourgeois ideology and, to an even greater extent, Fascist camp-thinking, are all about the cult of “origins”--be it within the walls of the family, the city or the nation--the Neorealist approach and frame-of-mind

exemplified in the works by De Sica, Rossellini, Moravia, Calvino and Pavese is more attentive to the Deleuzian concept of “becoming”: the continual production of difference, the very dynamism of change, perfectly embodied by the genuine mythologem of the Orphan-child. The first principle of philosophy for Deleuze, in fact, is that Universals explain nothing but must themselves be explained. Hence, the need for what he and Guattari call a *Geophilosophy*, that is, a philosophy capable of creating concepts on the plane of immanence, without falling back into the traps of transcendence; a philosophy that replaces genealogy with a geology, insofar as Geography is not only physical and human, but also mental, a mental landscape: “Geography wrests history from the cult of necessity in order to stress the irreducibility of contingency. It wrests it from the cult of origins in order to affirm the power of a milieu (what philosophy finds in the Greeks, said Nietzsche, is not an origin, but a milieu, an ambiance, an ambient atmosphere: the philosopher ceases to be a comet)” (96).

In this perspective, Jean-Paul Vernant’s *The Origins of Greek Thought*, first published in France in 1962, connects the birth of rational thought with the institution of the *polis* itself, a city-state of “friends,” of free men as rivals, structured both physically and mentally around a communal space: “Urban buildings were no longer grouped, as before, about a royal palace, ringed by fortifications. The city was now centered on the *agora*, [...] a public area where problems of general interest were debated. [...] What this urban framework in fact defined was a mental space; it opened a new spiritual horizon” (47-48). In commenting on Vernant’s intuition, Deleuze and Guattari underline the fact that the first philosophers were those who instituted a plane of immanence “like a sieve stretched over the chaos” (43). In this sense, they contrasted precisely with sages and priests, insofar as these are “religious personae [who] conceive of the institution of an always transcendent order

imposed from the outside by a great despot or by one god higher than others” (43). Once again, Geophilosophy tends to define itself in opposition to Transcendence. But we have to be very careful here: to rid ourselves of Transcendence does not mean that we have to rid ourselves of Utopia! On the contrary, Utopia, for Deleuze and Guattari is that which links philosophy to its own epoch, it is “the conjunction of philosophy [...] with the present milieu: political philosophy. [What matters most, then] is to distinguish between authoritarian utopias, or utopias of Transcendence, and immanent, revolutionary, libertarian utopias” (100).

⁴⁵ Now, in order to better grasp this fundamental--and much needed!--distinction, it might be useful to read an excerpt from a 1976 interview in which Deleuze defines his conception of idea:

Having an idea is not about ideology, it's a practical matter. Godard has a nice saying; “not a Just image, but just an image.” Philosophers ought to say “not the Just ideas, but just an idea” and bear this out in their activity. Because the Just ideas are always those that conform to accepted meanings or established precepts, they are always ideas that confirm something, even if it's something in the future, even if it's the future of the revolution. While “just an idea” is a becoming-present, a stammering of ideas, and can only be expressed in the form of questions that tend to confound any answers. (38-39)

Mutatis mutandis, the constant need to distinguish between authoritarian vs. libertarian Ideas might be extended also to the notion of Myth as such. Kerényi himself, as we have seen, has highlighted the fact that a myth, in order to be considered a “genuine epiphany”--and not a “technicized cliché”--has to present itself first of all as an *open* image, an “*un-closed* elaboration of the real” (*Dal mito* 156). Conversely, whenever a myth appears

⁴⁵ In *Mitologie intorno all'Illuminismo* Furio Jesi gives a somewhat similar definition of Utopia. According to him, it is “l'applicazione della visione alla realtà storica e ai suoi indigeni per salvare un volto umano” (109) ‘the application of vision to an historical reality and to its indigenous people, so as to save an image of man’.

“closed” on itself, it is simply a “dead myth” (*Dal mito* 156).⁴⁶ One could say that the profound strength and powerfulness of mythology lies precisely in the fact that a “genuine myth” can never be considered—to paraphrase Jean-Luc Godard—“a *Just* myth,” that is, a myth that wants to confirm something, by closing itself on a well-established precept. On the contrary, a genuine myth is always “just a myth,” a spontaneous and collective *un*-closed elaboration of the real, something that resembles quite closely the “openness” and the “becoming” of Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of libertarian Utopias.

Now, if we broaden our analysis of the Italian Neorealist experience to include the larger cultural “milieu” of the 1940s we can see that the Italian Neorealism as a whole might be fruitfully defined as a renewed and genuine interest for the Other as “a possible world”—to use Deleuze’s insightful definition (*Michel* 306)—that is, a conscious willingness to accept an *un*-closed elaboration of the real always already embedded in the Other. After all, as Fellini once said: “il Neorealismo è un modo di guardare alla realtà senza pregiudizi, [...] Non solo alla realtà sociale, ma a tutto ciò che c’è nell’uomo” (152; “Neorealism is a way of seeing reality without prejudice, [...] not just social reality but all that there is within a man”), and Rossellini himself used to consider Neorealism as the result of “una maggiore curiosità per gli individui [...] una posizione morale che si può spiegare in tre parole: l’amore del prossimo” (7-8; “An increased curiosity towards men [...] a moral position that can be explained in three words: love thy neighbor”).

⁴⁶ In his 1964 article *Dal mito genuino al mito tecnicizzato* (*From Technicized Myth, to Genuine Myth*), Kerényi offers the following definition of the word “technique”: “In our modern languages, by using the substantivized Greek adjective *techniché*—*Technik* in German, *tecnica* in Italian, *technique* in French and English—it is as if we were speaking of a *techniché techne*, a *techne* of *techne* of elaboration, that is, the accomplishment of the elaboration. Technique is *techne* in the process of becoming autonomous, of being-for-itself” (157).

Interestingly enough, as an emergent cultural phenomenon, this interest for the Other--conceivable here as a profound and genuine attraction towards new ways of looking, experiencing, and experimenting with the world--actually dates back to the 1930s, when American literature was first perceived in Italy as a genuinely subversive alternative to the encamped culture promoted by Fascism. As rightly pointed out by Peter Bondanella in his seminal work on Italian cinema, “American fiction was to prove a decisive external stimulus to the rise of neorealism. [It quickly] became a counterculture phenomenon among neorealist writers such as Pavese, Vittorini, or Italo Calvino, all of whom opposed its effortless realism with symbolic overtones to what they considered the inauthentic and bombastic rhetoric of official Fascist culture” (25).

It is precisely in this cultural milieu of rupture that appears a subtly subversive editorial project like *Americana*: the first full-length anthology of American writers to be published in Italian translation, edited by Elio Vittorini around 1940, with the fundamental contribution of Pavese. Initially hindered by the Fascist censorship of the time, the anthology was eventually published in 1942, albeit with all of Vittorini’s critical notes expunged, obtaining unexpectedly a great success amongst the Italian readership. In a famous 1947 essay published on the communist newspaper *L’Unità*, it is Pavese himself who recalls the exciting ambient atmosphere of those years:

Verso il 1930, quando il fascismo cominciava a essere “la speranza del mondo,” accadde ad alcuni giovani italiani di scoprire nei suoi libri l’America, una America pensosa e barbarica, felice e rissosa, dissoluta, feconda, greve di tutto il passato del mondo, e insieme giovane, innocente. Per qualche anno questi giovani lessero tradussero e scrissero con una gioia di scoperta e di rivolta che indignò la cultura ufficiale, ma il successo fu tanto che costrinse il regime a tollerare, per salvare la faccia. [...] Per molta gente l’incontro con Caldwell, Steinbeck, Saroyan, e perfino col vecchio Lewis, apersero il primo

spiraglio di libertà, il primo sospetto che non tutto nella cultura del mondo finisse coi fasci. (25)

(Around 1930, when Fascism was beginning to be ‘the hope of the world’, some young Italians happened to discover in their books America—an America thoughtful and barbaric, happy and truculent, dissolute, fecund, heavy with all the past of the world, and at the same time young, innocent. For several years these young people read, translated, and wrote with a joy of discovery and of revolt that infuriated the official culture; but the success was so great that it constrained the regime to tolerate it, in order to save face. [...] For many, the encounter with Caldwell, Steinbeck, Saroyan, or even with the old Lewis, opened the first crack of freedom, the first suspicion that not all the culture in the world was destined to end in fascism.)

Later on, in the 1940s, this same emergent “joy of discovery and of revolt” became more and more a dominant phenomenon--to use Raymond Williams’ analytic categories--amongst the intellectuals that orbited in the Neorealist milieu, to the extent that, what we have defined as the quintessential open-endedness of Italian Noorealism--the willingness of being put into question by the Other as a possible world--reappears again, in my view, at the basis of the two most important editorial projects of the mid-1940s: the influential periodical *Il Politecnico*, founded by Elio Vittorini in 1945, and the *Collezione di studi religiosi, entografici e psicologici*, also known as *Collezione viola*--the Purple Collection, from the color of the coversheets--officially inaugurated by Cesare Pavese in 1948, even though he had been working on it together with anthropologist Ernesto de Martino since 1943.

Both of these editorial projects were intended as an epistemological break with the provincialism of Italian Fascism, on the one side, and the dominating nineteenth-century idealism of Benedetto Croce’s philosophy, on the other. In this sense, what Ernesto de Martino wrote in reference to the *Collana viola* endeavor, may also apply to Vittorini’s *Il Politecnico*: “La collezione Einaudi [...]--che potrebbe sembrare a chi la giudicasse superficialmente mancante di intrinseche unità--rispecchia appunto la crisi del vecchio

umanesimo circoscritto della cultura tradizionale e il tentativo di questo umanesimo in crisi di superare la sua limitazione e di conquistare nuove province umane” (36) ‘The Einaudi collection [...]—which, if judged superficially could appear to be lacking in intrinsic unity—perfectly mirrors the crisis of the old circumscribed humanism of traditional culture, as well as the attempt of this humanism in crisis to overcome its own limitations by conquering new human provinces’.

According to Lucia Re, despite its short life between September 1945 and December 1947, *Il Politecnico* had the undeniable merit:

[...] of launching a campaign to open up Italian culture in what Gramsci would have called a ‘cosmopolitan’ rather than ‘national-popular’ direction, publishing articles, debates, and interviews on major European trends in psychoanalysis, existentialism, and modernist literature. Translations of literary texts by T.S. Eliot, Auden, Brecht Eluard, and Malraux appeared together with reproductions of works by Grosz, Man Ray, Max Ernst, and Picasso and essays by Sartre and Lukács, just to cite a few; Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) was published in installments, whereas elementary introductions to the work of contemporary thinkers and writers appeared side-by-side with in-depth analyses of important theoretical and literary problems and issues. (100-01)

As for the *Collana viola*, in the first two years of its existence, from 1948 to 1950, Pavese and de Martino published in Italian for the first time fundamental works such as the above-cited *The Science of Mythology: Essays on the Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, by Károly Kerényi and Carl Gustav Jung; *The Soul of the Primitive*, by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl; *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, by Bronislaw Malinowski; or *The Primitive Mind and Modern Civilization*, by Charles Robert Aldrich. Despite the intrinsic difficulty of the topics and the eclecticism of the overall layout, the collection turned out to be another huge success precisely because, as noted by Angelini, “[essa] si inseriva al momento giusto nel processo di svecchiamento e di sprovincializzazione [dell’Italia]. Ma fu

pure motivo di scandalo, la collana, venendo essa come un'astronave minacciosa a calare nel villaggio italiano, saturo di Realismo e di Idealismo, tutto orientato--ma a parole--verso il sole della Ragione e dell'Avvenire" (11; "[it] appeared at the right time within the process of renewal and modernization [of Italy]. But it was also a great scandal, landing as a menacing spaceship in the Italian village, saturated at the time with Realism and Idealism, and all-oriented--even though only apparently--towards the sun of Reason and Future").

In my view, the comparative, ethnographic, and anthropological approach of the *Collana viola*, as well as the genuine eclecticism of *Il Politecnico*, fully belong to the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s, insofar as they both actively worked towards a broadening of what had been the encamped Italian culture under Fascism. Once again, my thesis is that Neorealist films and novels, on the one side, and Neorealist editorial projects on the other, are all characterized by a renewed interest in the Other as "a possible world" (Deleuze, *Michel* 306), a willingness to accept an un-closed elaboration of the real, so as to reconstruct human experience at all levels--cinematic, literary, editorial--after the dehumanizing technicization of Fascism and the traumatic events of WWII, as well as to "awake" audiences and redearships in/to a genuinely open-ended, inclusive, and non-nationalistic idea of community.

The subsequent re-linking, through the mythologem of the Orphan-child, of a mythical past with a possible future-to-come, of the "anachronistic" with the "hyperactual"--to use Derrida's expression--as "democracy-to-come" (*Echographies* 10), might indeed represent an attempt, on the part of Italian Neorealist directors and writers, to achieve what Jesi himself considered the essence of humanism: "la salvaguardia degli elementi che garantiscono all'uomo sopravvivenza, amore, e libertà" (*Germania* 47; "the protection of the

elements that guarantee Man's survival, love and freedom"). After all, a renewed humanism is precisely what characterizes some of the most relevant interventions within the Italian cultural debate of the time: from Cesare Pavese's often-quoted 1945 article *Ritorno all'uomo* (Return to Man), to Alberto Moravia's 1946 essay *L'uomo come fine* (Man as an End), or Luchino Visconti's 1943 influential *Cinema antropomorfico* (Anthropomorphic cinema), all of which share the predominance given to the Other as "a possible world" (Delueze, *Michel* 306).

In *Ritorno all'uomo*, for instance, Pavese underlines the fact that, after the traumatic events of WWII, with all their blood-spilling and ferocious contrapositions, our constant goal should be to go "verso l'uomo" (198; "towards Man"), so as to answer "l'inconscia supplica di ogni presenza umana" (198; "the unconscious plea of every human presence"), precisely because the main obstacle, the wall that needs to be torn down, is Man's solitude.

Analogously, Visconti's essay *Cinema Antropomorfico* willfully places Man at the center of the new type of cinema advocated, in the wake of WWII, by some of the most relevant protagonists of the Italian Neorealist experience: "L'esperienza fatta mi ha insegnato che il peso dell'essere umano, la sua presenza, è la sola 'cosa' che veramente colmi il fotogramma, che l'ambiente è da lui creato, dalla sua vivente presenza, e che dalle passioni che lo agitano questo acquista verità e rilievo" ("My own experience has taught me that the weight of Man, his presence, is the only 'thing' that truly fills up the photogram, that context is created by such living presence, and that through the passions that stir it, this latter acquires truthfulness and relevance"). Moreover, as noted by Moravia in *L'uomo come fine*, "adoperare l'uomo come mezzo deriva dal non porsi l'uomo come fine ossia dal non avere rispetto dell'uomo" (207) ("employing man as a means derives from not considering man as the end, from a lack

of respect for man” 25). Conversely, acknowledging the image of man as an end instead of a means “renderebbe l’uomo alla sensazione gioiosa di avvicinarsi con i suoi sforzi al migliore se stesso” (239) (“would hand him over to the joyful feeling that he was approximating to the best in himself by his own effort” 55).

Surprisingly enough, though, this profoundly open-ended and inclusive approach found at the core of the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s was deeply hindered, if not overtly opposed, by the sociopolitical context of the newborn Italian Republic: a democracy whose public education system, for instance, continued to be largely based on Giovanni Gentile’s reform of 1924 and whose official cultural policies were shaped more and more by the ideological camp-thinking requirements of the Cold War. In his 1964 preface to *The Path to The Spider’s Nests*, looking back at those years, Italo Calvino acutely defined the literary side of Italian Neorealism as “una potenzialità diffusa nell’aria. E presto spenta. Già negli Anni Cinquanta il quadro era cambiato: Pavese morto, Vittorini chiuso in un silenzio d’opposizione, Moravia che in un contesto diverso veniva acquistando un altro significato (non più esistenziale ma naturalistico) e il romanzo italiano prendeva il suo corso elegiaco-moderato-sociologico” (1201) (“a potential that was in the air. A potential that was quickly exhausted. By the 1950s the picture had already altered, starting with major writers: Pavese was dead, Vittorini had retreated into an antagonistic silence, Moravia working in a different context was acquiring a different meaning (no longer an existentialist, but rather a naturalistic), and the Italian novel followed its course of moderate, elegiac, sociological analysis” 26-7). Analogously, film director Giuseppe De Santis noted, years later, in reference to the cinematic side of Italian Neorealism, that: “[...] questo cinema in qualche modo morì, certo non di morte naturale [...] Il Neorealismo, per essere stato quello che è

stato, fu un cinema che si volle emarginare e lentamente scomparve, diciamo così, dalla cultura italiana, anche se ha rappresentato forse un momento di coscienza critica della cultura italiana” (qt. in Vitti 27; “this cinema somehow died, certainly not of natural causes [...] Neorealism, being what it has been, was a cinema that was purposely emarginated until it slowly disappeared from Italian culture, even though it represented perhaps a moment of critical consciousness within Italian culture”).

What I want to argue here is that, if the mid-1940s can be read as a moment of profound de-territorialization, which gave birth to an open-ended mental space, perfectly embodied by the genuine Orphan-child mythologem, at the beginning of the 1950s, as the Cold War ideological requirements became more and more pressing, the Italian cultural landscape closed itself once again into opposite “camps,” and this is precisely why my analysis of the Italian Neorealist experience stops on the threshold of the new decade. The year 1950 is marked not only by the highly symbolic suicide of Pavese, which gives a sense of closure to a whole epoch, but also by the beginning of the Korean War, generally considered as the first significant armed conflict of the new historical phase, which will gradually force everyone to take sides for one of the two encamped “blocs.” At the same time, in 1952 the Catholic Holy Office put on the Index all of Moravia’s works and in January 1954 the Italian Parliament passed a law prohibiting state funding for films that could be considered influenced by the communist party, whereas an up-and-coming Demochristian politician--the future seven-times Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti--openly accused De Sica of rendering “un pessimo servizio alla patria” (“an awful service to his country”).

Interestingly enough, though, the attacks towards the Neorealist way of looking at the world came not only from the Church and the Christian-Democrats, but also from that same

Italian Communist Party, around which orbited more or less directly many of the protagonists of the Neorealist experience. Calvino, Moravia, Vittorini and others, for instance, found themselves increasingly criticized by more hard-line Marxist critics such as Alicata and Muscetta, who accused them of such heresies as “irrationalism,” “voluntarism,” “subjectivism,” and “decadentism.”⁴⁷ Both Togliatti and Croce openly and unconditionally condemned psychoanalysis and modernist aesthetics, thus undermining from the outset potentially subversive projects of cultural renewal such as Vittorini’s *Il Politecnico* (forced to close down as early as 1947) or Pavese’s *Collana Viola* (initially disavowed even by de Martino, after Pavese’s death), whereas Gualtiero De Santi rightly speaks of a more generalized “pregiudizio marxi-crociano di un’unità formale e dialettica” (56; “Marxi-Crocian prejudice of formal and dialectic unity”), the lack of which pushed many left-wing critics--Alicata in primis--to tear apart a film like *Miracle in Milan*.

In this perspective, the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s can be interpreted as a subversive and open-ended cultural phenomenon of rupture that, ethically speaking, placed itself literally “between camps,” and was eventually caught in the crossfire, coming from opposite sociopolitical, encamped, macrocosms, while attempting to advocate for a conscious rebuttal of every camp-thinking attitude as such. It is precisely in this sense that we can argue, together with Lucia Re, that “the quest for freedom from Fascism was governed in Italy by a paternal(istic) discourse and a patriarchal organizational structure that reflected many of the very same values against which it aimed to struggle” (290), thus perpetuating, for instance, the same principles of domination and the same strategy of repression of individual desires which had appeared as inhuman in the enemy.

⁴⁷ See Asor Rosa, “Lo stato democratico e i partiti politici”, pp. 594-95.

As Re goes on to specify in her analysis, even Gramsci's theories--extremely influential in postwar Italy, especially after the publication of the first volume of his letters by Einaudi in 1947--were "deeply conservative in this regard, arguing for coercion and strict regimentation in matters of sexuality, the family, morality, and education ('justified' by the strategic political needs of the working class)" (59). Faced with a mindset fully inscribed in the system from which Gramsci was seeking to free himself and his fellow comrades, Guido Quazza, one of the first to write about the Italian Resistance movement in Northern Italy during WWII, will poignantly ask himself: "Per cosa lottiamo se, una volta cacciati via i tedeschi, altri vogliono imporci un nuovo tipo di Fascismo?" (179; "What are we fighting for if, once the Germans have been chased out, others want to impose a new kind of Fascism on us?"

This is precisely what compelled Calvino to write in a 1948 article entitled "Ingegneri e demolitori", "bisognerà far nascere una gamma di personaggi che inaugurino tutto un mondo di nuove fantasie, di nuovi contatti con la vita, la morte, l'amore, la città, la natura, una gamma di personaggi positivi ma non legnosi e retorici [...] se si vuole che veramente siano di paradigma agli uomini nuovi" (1482; "it will be necessary to give birth to a range of characters who will unveil a whole world of new fantasies, of new contacts with life, death, love, the city, nature; a range of characters that will be positive but neither rigid nor rhetorical [...] if we want them to be paradigmatic for a new kind of man"). Hence, the paradox of an open-ended paradigm advocated here by Calvino, might very well find its most relevant incarnation in the genuine, double-sided, Orphan-child mytholgem.

More in general, if we follow Paul Gilroy and agree that modernity as such defined a new role for its citizens based on a "distinctive ecology of belonging" (55)--that is, a special

formula for the relationship amongst territory, individuality, property, war--then it is actually this pervasive formula of belonging that the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s attempted to put into question through the “bastard” figure per excellence: the Orphan-child mythologem. After all, as many of the works here analyzed have amply demonstrated, even the class-based identification of the countryless proletarians might be considered a matter of camp-thinking, if it entails a radically exclusionary and dogmatic contraposition with the “others.” As Gilroy puts it: “Taking pride of finding sanctuary in an exclusive identity affords a means to acquire certainty about who one is and where one fits, [realizing the] modern goal of an ordered self operating in an orderly polity [...] supplemented by the idea that the stability and coherence of the self [is] a precondition for authoritative and reliable truth-seeking activity” (108)

But, as we have seen, the Orphan-child mythologem’s perspective, if genuinely conceived, offers indeed a ready alternative to “the stern discipline of primordial kinship and rooted belonging” (Gilroy 117), insofar as hybrid mentality and complex commingling are not the loss and betrayal we are always told they must be. On the contrary, to acknowledge and foster the open-ended Orphan-child’s take on the world might achieve what Jesi defines as “il passaggio dalla disperazione determinata dall’abbandono a una serenità raggiunta nel ritrovare nell’essere abbandonati misteriose forze guaritrici” (*Germania* 158; “the move from the desperation of being abandoned to a serenity achieved by rediscovering in the condition itself of being abandoned mysterious healing forces”). In fact, many positive aspects can be acknowledged and celebrated in mixing and in moving between camps, as well as in crossing cultures.

For one thing, the “bastard” nature of the genuine Orphan-child mythologem--just like Gilroy’s conception of diaspora--makes the spatialization of identity problematic and interrupts the ontologization of space, “without suggesting the existence of anterior ‘uncontaminated’ purities [so to] give up the illusion that purity has ever existed, let alone provide a foundation for civil society” (250). Secondly, if it is true that movement can provide “an alternative to the sedentary poetics of either soil or blood” (Gilroy 111), then the open-ended ending of the films and novels analyzed in my dissertation can indeed function as an ethically charged wake-up call for past and present audiences/readerships, insofar as it calls us directly into action, in our everyday interactions with the Other. In a way, being “moved” to tears and/or “sympathize,” in the Greek sense of the term--that is, to “suffer for and with another”--is already a powerful way to literally de-territorialize oneself, to move away from every encamped standing-point and acquire a new perspective on things, while being drawn from something or someone that is outside of me and that interrogates me by its sheer presence, thus allowing me to realize the Deleuzian ideal of “being foreign in one’s own language” (*Negotiations*), which, as we have seen, is one of the most important traits of the Italian Neorealist experience as a whole.

To conclude, if we are to interpret the Enlightenment, in the wake of Foucault, not as a period of history, but rather as an *ethos*, an attitude, a “mode of reflective relation to the present [and] a permanent critique of our historical era,” then the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s might be considered as a fundamental instance of such *ethos*, capable of contrasting every Fascist frame of mind, equally conceived not as a specific period of history, but as a mental attitude that can always return. At the same time, though, we should acknowledge that, in order to stand any real chance of success, this permanent

critique has to pass *through* the Other, not only because the Other *is* the structure of the possible, but also and foremost because “the possible”--as Deleuze and Guattari have amply demonstrated--is not a Transcendent idea, a Utopia lost in the fogs of the future. On the contrary, the possible exists only as expressed, that is, only in something or someone already expressing it. In my view, the philosophical concept of “permanent revolution” should thus be conceived accordingly, not as a constant fight in the name of some Just ideas, but simply as a constant openness to the *puissance* and immanent “virtue-ality” of the Other, a constant willingness of being put into question by other possible worlds, both as mental landscapes and geographical milieus.⁴⁸

As my dissertation has engaged in demonstrating, one of the greatest accomplishments of the Italian Neorealist experience of the 1940s has been precisely its ability to foster a politics of complexity, aimed at overcoming all the hegemonic simplifications--oftentimes too easily dichotomous--of camp-thinking, thus allowing us to move from the “territoriality” of the organic intellectual advocated by Gramsci, to the “nomadism” of the Deleuzian approach, perfectly embodied by the Orphan-child mythologem, who is capable of overthrowing all sorts of closed and clichés-ridden ways of

⁴⁸ As Deleuze and Guattari put it: “Philosophy does not consist in knowing and is not inspired by truth. Rather, it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure. [...] We will not say of many books of philosophy that they are false, for that is to say nothing, but rather that they lack importance or interest, precisely because they do not create any concept or contribute an image of thought or beget a persona worth the effort. Only teachers can write ‘false’ in the margins, perhaps; but readers doubt the importance and interest, that is to say, the novelty of what they are given to read” (82-83). Analogously, the “science of myth,” according to Jesi, can be considered a “science,” *only* if we accept that any science whatsoever has, on the one side, an inevitable margin of error in the appreciation of phenomena, and, on the other, the fundamental function of acknowledging both the existence of such a margin, as well as the limitations that the margin in question imposes upon the epistemological endeavor of Science itself. This is why the science of myth might be defined, in Jesi’s own words, “accezione--esemplare--della scienza di come ci si sbaglia: delle occasioni, del modo e delle ragioni dello sbaglio” (*Mitologie* 184-5; “an acceptance, albeit exemplary, of the science of how-one-can-be-mistaken: a science of the instances, the ways, and the reasons for being mistaken”).

looking at the world, without falling back into the traps of Just ideas. What unites films like De Sica's *The Children Are Watching*, *Miracle in Milan* and Rossellini's *Open City*, with novels such as Moravia's *Agostino*, Calvino's *The Path to The Spiders Nests*, and Pavese's *The House on the Hill*, is precisely their willingness to foster an open-ended interpretation of the real at the level of the family, the city, the nation, by subversively estranging, through the prism of the double-sided and liminal Orphan-child mythologem, the rhetoric surrounding those enclosed "camps."

Seventy years later, it is actually up to us to keep watch--or "wake"--over the "aesthetic supplement" still contained in those works.⁴⁹ As Deleuze once wrote to Serge Daney: "If criticism has any point [...] it's to the extent that [a work of art] bears in it something supplementary, a sort of gap between it and a still virtual audience, so we have to play for time and preserve the traces as we wait" (*Negotiations* 73). To me, one of the most relevant ethical stand-points of Italian Neorealism, still valuable today, is that of acknowledging and cherishing the unstable, subversive and open-ended perspective of every genuine Orphan-child mythologem as such, so as to finally allow us to move from the "wake" of WWII, to the "wake" of Italian Neorealism, that is: beyond camps. After all, as Paul Gilroy ominously reminds us by drawing on Primo Levi's quintessentially de-humanizing experience:

Our conduct must be closely guided [...] by the knowledge that these awful possibilities are always much closer than we like to imagine. To prevent their reappearance we must dwell on them and with them, for they have become an essential moral resource: a compass sensitive to the demanding, individualizing, anti-ethical field of postmodernity. [...] There are no more acceptable excuses for the failure to become completely familiar with the

⁴⁹ The expression comes from Serge Daney, but has been taken up also by Deleuze, notably in his preface to Daney's *Ciné-Journal* of 1986.

institutional life of camps. This means being alive to the camps out there now and the camps around the corner, the camps that are being prepared (86-7).

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