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Death and the gaze in *Rome, Open City*[1]

ABSTRACT

The article aims to confront the representation of death in Roma città aperta *(*Rome, Open City*) (Rossellini, 1945). Leaving aside the relationship between real death and fictional death, by which is meant the direct link between the film and historical events (already widely analysed by scholars), the essay employs the epic and heroic dimensions in relation to the narration of death; analyses the representation of the foreigner as a bearer of death; focuses, therefore, on the gaze with which Roberto Rossellini observes death, on the spaces and times of the killings; highlights the symbolic and mythological dimension of the film; and, finally, confronts the figure of the scapegoat and the processes of elaboration of memory and mourning.*

KEYWORDS

Rome, Open City
Roberto Rossellini
representation of death
representation of heroism
representation of the foreigner
epic narration
memory
mourning

THE PROXIMITY OF DEATH IN TIME OF WAR

In 1915, after the First World War had already begun, Freud wrote a brief essay titled 'Reflections on war and death' in which he speculated on how war changed 'our attitude towards death', preventing us from keeping it at a distance and forcing us to bring it back into the realms of our everyday experience. His argument does not concern soldiers on the battlefield but 'those who have stayed at home and have only to wait for the loss of one of their dear ones by wounds, disease or infection' (Freud [1915] 1957: 291). Freud's reflections can be extended to the Second World War and in particular to Italy between 1943 and 1945, when a terrible civil war made death a constant presence throughout the land and within the fabric even of 'open' cities such as

1. Article translated from Italian by Emilia Griffin.

Rome, which were meant to be protected from the military operations of Nazis and Allies alike. 'In a bar, in a restaurant, at the cinema, in one's house', writes historian Giovanni De Luna, 'death hid behind a quick glance, a word too many, a curse not suppressed fast enough' (2006: 14), just like Anna Magnani's scream and dash as the working-class Pina in *Roma città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*) (Rossellini, 1945) when she tries to stop the Nazis from taking away her husband-to-be. Rossellini's film can be read as a reflection on death, according to Freud's investigation into how civilization reverts to humanity's primordial impulses in times of war. Freud states,

> War strips us of the later accretions of civilization, and lays bare the primal man in each of us. It compels us once more to be heroes who cannot believe in their own death; it stamps strangers as enemies, whose death is to be brought about or desired; it tells us to disregard the death of those we love.
>
> ([1915] 1957: 299)

Re-reading Freud's argument in the light of Italy's military experience and social and political history in the 1940s, I will examine the representation of death in *Rome, Open City* through different, but interconnected, perspectives. Leaving aside the relationship between real and fictional deaths, or rather, the film's direct link to historical events (which has already been amply covered by the critics [see Forgacs 2000; Bruni 2006; Roncoroni 2006]), I will analyse the epic and heroic dimensions of the narrative of death and the representation of the foreigner as the 'bearer of death'. The core of my reflection, however, will be dedicated to the gaze through which Rossellini observes death, and to the spaces and times of those killings. Finally, the film's symbolic and mythographic dimensions will lead me to consider the figure of the scapegoat and the ways in which the processes of memory and grief are elaborated.

These different approaches can be applied across Rossellini's entire War Trilogy due to the shared sense of history at the heart of *Rome, Open City*, *Paisà* (*Paisan*) (1946) and *Germania anno zero* (*Germany, Year Zero*) (1948). For Rossellini, to confront history is above all to confront death. History, understood as the march of civilization, is for him an uninterrupted series of suffering, pain, privation, loss and extreme action, but also of learning. The lessons taught by trauma and sorrow should push us (as Rossellini's future television career would demonstrate) to privilege reason over impulse, and lead, according to Freud's not entirely convincing ideal outcomes, to 'a strengthening of the intellect, which is beginning to govern instinctual life' ([1932] 1964: 214). Rossellini was accused by post-war Italian Marxist critics of having a spiritual view of history, understood as divine punishment or as a constant struggle between the forces of good and evil. In reality, this is just the opinion of the protagonist priest of *Rome, Open City*. The martyr narrative that emerges in all three films of the Trilogy is characterized above all as being an aspect of impotence, occurring alongside the strength of the individual in the face of uncontrollable and destructive events. Rossellini's gaze is more anthropological than religious, although it makes constant reference to the iconography and symbols of Catholic culture. In this context, sacrifice as represented in his films is the corollary of an idea of history understood as a *labour* that affects existence, before it is even configured as a collision of opposing visions of the world and society.

THE EPIC OF DEATH AND HEROISM

The epic bestowal of *Rome, Open City* is directly connected to the portrayal of death, which constitutes the most innovative cornerstone around which the narrative revolves. The main character abandons the film near the middle with no forewarning, in the same sudden manner as she departs from life. The strength of Rossellini's work consists in layering a plot of violent deaths onto a classical structure of storytelling and representation.[2] The killings invest the film with the power of shock. As Millicent Marcus writes, 'neo-realism may be said to begin with the death of Pina, which forces her story to open to history and forsake any easy withdrawal into literary formulas and predictable plots' (1986: 44).

Through the centrality given to the moment of death, Rossellini reclaims the original meaning of the epic, which is, as Vernant suggests when referring to the world of ancient Greece, to establish a collective memory, to consecrate a social identity through the commemoration of the dead. Vernant writes

> The epic is not simply a literary genre; alongside funeral rituals and in the same line, it is one of the institutions the Greeks developed to give an answer to the question of death, to bring it within culture, to integrate it into social life and thought.
>
> (1985: 88)

The epic, therefore, allows death to be overcome by bringing its memory within social structures. The deaths of *Rome, Open City* are, in a way, monuments, tombstones in which the memory of the past connects to the aspirations of the future.[3]

The heroic sublimation of the martyrs of the Nazi occupation is built, almost as a counter-reaction, on their portrayal as ordinary people immersed in the dynamics of a tragic daily life. The figure of Pina corresponds, above all, to their anti-heroic and unexceptional characteristics. Her desperate run, cut short by the German rifles, is a life impulse oblivious to death. It is a leap of love unleashed without predetermination. Considered in the light of Freud's mythological theory of instincts ([1932] 1964: 211), Pina represents the lack of control of impulses: those of a destructive nature, directed outside oneself and against the German enemy, whom she slaps repeatedly, and those of an erotic-sexual nature that relate to emotional connections and are directed at life. Her involuntary heroism is therefore entrusted to the most primordial dynamics of the subconscious and of humanity. For this reason, in the economy of the killings portrayed in the film, her act of defiance in the face of death is the most trenchant, in the sense that it produces identification beyond ideologies and with the different sides in war. In fact, it is her run, more than her corpse, which has become a mythic image of Italian cinema and, at the same time, of an epoch of rebuilding the country's society. That run has assumed the role of emblematically representing the regenerating force of a nation.[4]

Only the body can be cloaked in heroism, while the corpse confronts us again with death as an unknown event, a spectacle that appalls, but does not regard us. All corpses, whether of enemies, friends or family, have something obscene about them if not arranged according to the rituals of grief. Pina's exposed and gartered legs are not so very different from those of Claretta Petacci, Mussolini's lover, whose body was exposed in Milan's Piazzale Loreto, alongside that of the *duce*. The social constraints that impose control

2. Almost all scholars of *Rome, Open City*, in Italy and abroad, insist on the film's contaminated character and its links to the methods of representation and to classical genres. According to Peter Brunette it is 'one of Rossellini's most conventional films, at least in terms of its narrative and dramatic structures' (1987: 43). David Forgacs defines it as 'a transitional film – for Rossellini, for the cinema, for a society coming out of two decades of Fascism – rather than a wholly new kind of work' (2000: 11–12). More recent contributions underline the relationship with the tradition of 1930s cinema (Bondanella 2004), but also the innovative work of Rossellini on genre and gender clichés (Landy 2004). In the Italian context I signal Bruni (2006). The harshest perspective on the 'old schemes' with which the film is shot remains by screenwriter and assistant director Sergio Amidei, in Faldini and Fofi (1979: 95).

3. The commemorative function of *Rome, Open City* is discussed by Tonje H. Sørensen (2012: 193–97).

4. The image of Magnani's sprint has almost become a devotional icon. We can see it through the words used by Susan Sontag to refer to photographs that can transform themselves into 'poster-ready photographs'. 'They commemorate, in no less blunt fashion than postage stamps, Important Historical Moments' (Sontag 2003: 77).

over destructive drives are suspended during time of war, engendering a veritable 'celebration of death'. In this manner historian Sergio Luzzatto defined the myth of the foundation of liberated Italy that took place in Piazzale Loreto, where the spectacle of the enemies' bodies is juxtaposed with that of the corpses of friends, the partisans, displayed in the square some time before (Luzzatto 1998: 164). As in the primordial phases of humanity, the winner's triumph occurs through the exhibition and violation of the prey, or the lifeless body.

In *Rome, Open City*, Pina's garter is only shown in a quick frame. The sudden vision of immodesty is nuanced by the presence of the son in altar-boy clothing, who throws himself over his mother's body. In this manner, the sacred meets the profane, elevating it. The garters become invisible when Don Pietro gathers up the body in a composition that, as is often remarked, evokes the icon of Michelangelo's *Pieta*, with the priest in place of the Madonna and Pina's body replacing that of Christ. This depiction is particularly dear to Rossellini, who used it again in the Florentine episode of *Paisan* in which the partisan is killed, and at the end of *Germany, Year Zero*.[5] Through this iconography the director underlines the victim's sacrifice and, at the same time, the mourning over her body.

If the heroism of the working-class woman played by Magnani can be classified as natural, that of the communist Manfredi has a political and social motivation. He embodies the freedom fighter, who puts his life in service to a cause. At the beginning of the film he escapes over the rooftops of Piazza di Spagna, re-enacting the real-life experiences of the screenwriter Amidei, as witnessed by his landlord and his waitress, who act their own respective roles in the film. In the torture chamber he portrays the courageous individual who bears the pain of the body and faces his death to affirm an ideal of life to which he ties his individuality on the one hand and his connection with collective identity on the other. Manfredi's heroism becomes ever more incisive since it relates to the heroism of a community of freedom fighters. Turning to the Austrian defector, who warns him about the difficulty of resisting torture, Manfredi states: 'We are not heroes, but they won't learn a thing. I assure you'. With the word 'us' he refers not just to himself and Don Pietro, but to the entire company of 'resistance fighters' who were tortured in Via Tasso and died without betraying the cause. The 'us' replacing the 'I' negates the individualistic rhetoric of heroic behaviour, reconnecting it to a practice of collective sharing. If Magnani's 'fall' – highlighted by Rancière (2006: 127) – was expressed through her body, Manfredi's is circumscribed mainly to his face, the emblematic place of individuality and identity. His bruised face and his 'falling' head show, beyond the evident Christian symbolic logics, the indomitable advance of integrity/conscience. The juxtaposition of the elegant, glacial and homosexual figure of the German Bergmann with the wounded and scorned flesh of the communist partisan has the effect of suggesting his resistance to torture as proof of healthy virility. The contrast between Bergmann's sophisticated cleanliness of speech, behaviour and dress, and the nakedness, silence and disjointed screams of Manfredi's pain underlines not only the moral abyss that separates perpetrator and victim but also their profound anthropological difference.

The heroism of the priest evokes, of course, a wider community than that of the 'resistance fighters', and is centred on faith in an otherworldly justice. Right from Alberto Consiglio's original subject,[6] Don Pietro affirms that while 'dying well is easy, living well is much harder' – repeating a phrase attributed

5. The most exhaustive analysis of the references to sacred icons is compiled by Virgilio Fantuzzi (1995: 264–76).

6. The first script for *Rome, Open City*, written by Alberto Consiglio, is reprinted in Roncoroni (2006: 419–21).

to Don Morosini,[7] which is kept in the film. After the execution squad's first shooting, the priest, already wounded, speaks another line by Don Morosini – 'God, forgive them, for they know not what they do' – echoing Christ on the Golgotha (Roncoroni 2006: 325, 327). The 'beautiful death' of the Christian hero can only have as its model the sacrifice of Christ. The priest carries humanity's crimes, original and contingent, viewing war as a cataclysm provoked by the sins of mankind, and in this way, just like Christ, it projects his own testimony into a new sphere of regeneration, giving the children who witness his death a model of life and a future outlook. For the entire duration of the film the priest is surrounded by the children who play two complementary games: football in the parish yard and play-war in Pina's attic and the streets. Their heroism initially imitates the adults', immersing themselves in a spirit of adventure that engages all the protagonists of the Resistance. The children represent a choir that is living and playful, but at the same time scarred by trauma and loss. Their leader Romoletto's obsession with bombs is already etched in his torn body. As in many Neorealist films, childhood is no more than a privileged space of the 'massacre of innocents' perpetuated by war.

7. Don Giuseppe Morosini and Don Pietro Pappagallo, both shot by Nazi soldiers, are the real people who inspired the character of Don Pietro in the film.

8. See, for example, reviews by James Agee (1946) and by Joseph Foster (1946).

DEATH IS CLOSE BUT COMES FROM FAR AWAY

Rome, Open City is founded on the demonization of the foreigner: the role of the enemy is almost exclusively personified by Germans, who become the primary agents of death. While Nazi squadrons march as monstrous automatons in the city at the beginning of the film, the top brass are shown almost exclusively inside its offices or in the torture chamber, significantly connected to the salon room where alcohol and drugs are consumed to the playing of a piano. The identity of the German enemy is founded on the co-presence of an extreme sophistication of civilization, which has reached the highest point of decadence, with the return to primitive barbarity. The model that emerges is the biblical one of Sodom and Gomorrah, although elevated and composed in its tones. Sadism and sodomy become explicit or implicit traits of Nazi behaviour.

While Italian critics, on the release of the film, almost completely ignored the sexual connotations of the characters, foreign critics immediately highlighted Bergmann's homosexuality and that of his assistant, Ingrid.[8] Their psychological monstrosity is combined with an evident smoothness and care in their physical appearances, and the ceremoniousness of their communications. The character of Ingrid, for example, is built on the seductive appeal of the demon, which presents itself as a saving angel to Marina. To avoid depicting the Nazis only as blind agents of evil, Rossellini adds small remedial adjustments through the character of the Austrian defector, who refuses to identify with the German cause, and the figure of Major Hartmann, who expresses an individual conscience that, however, is unable to elude the laws of war. In the scene that takes place in the living room adjacent to Manfredi's torture chamber, Hartmann gets drunk to forget his involvement in the German racial mythologies and the strategies of horror that are leading to his self-annihilation. Alcohol allows him to abandon official mystification and bring his conscience to the fore. Nevertheless, this will not stop him from enacting the role of executioner with extreme coldness during the killing of Don Pietro the following morning. In parallel to this, the forces of good, represented by the popular, religious and partisan groups that act in the city of Rome, include some grey areas occupied by the negative characters of Marina and Lauretta. Both cases highlight a femininity corrupted by money, sex and drugs.

There has already been ample commentary on how *Rome, Open City* does not confront the most pressing issue, a direct discussion of fascism, which is instead presented as serving a supporting role to Nazism. Usually the fascists are shown through the eyes of the Germans, who do not mask their contempt. They are largely servile figures, void of ideals. They exhibit a raw chauvinism expressed in jokes about women's thighs or inappropriate looks, as in the case of the soldier during the search of Pina's house. Even so, no fascist becomes a bearer of death. In the scene of Don Pietro's shooting, the Italians prove unable to kill.

Rome, Open City celebrates the unity of the resistance with obvious simplifications, presenting it as a movement of liberation from the foreigner and removing the civil war that divided the country. This mythology of the Resistance as a patriotic war was explicitly adopted by the post-war governments of newly liberated Italy and by the Left's political forces who contributed to the politics of social appeasement after the trauma of civil war. As Susan Sontag reminds us: 'Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as collective memory… But there is collective instruction' (2003: 76). If 'remembering is an ethical act' and 'memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead', it is also true that in collective history 'to make peace is to forget. To reconcile, it is necessary that memory be faulty and limited' (Sontag 2003: 103). Rossellini's film provides the mould and model of future films about the resistance that usually display the stereotypes of the 'good Italian' and the 'bad German',[9] the union between the priest and the partisan, or between Catholicism and communism, the strength of the popular element and the distinction between a healthy and a corrupt femininity, from which the enemy recruits its spies.

LOOKING AT DEATH

Rossellini's camera has 'death in its eyes', as Vernant described the Gorgon in his studies on ancient Greece. Before becoming 'the machine that kills bad people', as in his film based on a story by Eduardo De Filippo and produced in 1948, the Rossellinian gaze in *Rome, Open City* not only puts the death of 'good' people into focus, but the importance of not looking away from the atrocities inflicted on the victim's body. This extremism and lack of 'decency' were received harshly by Italian critics at the time, who interpreted the scene of Manfredi's torture as a concession to bad taste, voyeurism and a spectacularization of violence. Rossellini inflicts the shock of the image on the spectator, abandoning censorship and stylistic conventions to show the unwatchable and the unbearable. With a now almost mythical quote, Serge Daney identified in this Rossellinian act the watershed moment between two eras of the cinematographic image. 'Modern cinema – he wrote – was born with *Rome, Open City* and the torture scene witnessed by a third person' (1983: 174–75). Recalling Daney's metaphor, Alain Bergala underlines how Rossellini's way of filming – including works subsequent to *Rome, Open City* – is linked to violence and devices of torture, often combined with the image of confession. 'The finality of this conception of cinema as forceps and criterion of truth justifies, in the eyes of the modern cinematographer, the terror and cruelty of what is filmed' (Bergala 1984: 14).[10]

The violent scenes in *Rome, Open City* also disturbed contemporary critics because of their closeness in space and time, establishing a bridge between artistic representation and the raw memory of lived experience. Rossellini

9. These stereotypes were analysed by the historian Filippo Focardi (2013).

10. The 'immodesty' of Rossellini's gaze has already been mentioned by Jacques Rivette in his famous 'Lettre sur Rossellini' (1955: 22).

broke the prohibition on pushing the gaze right into the tormented flesh that the film's screenplay observed, where the explicitness of the tortures inflicted on Manfredi was weakened through the pretext of Don Pietro's shortsightedness when deprived of his glasses. The shots of the priest's point of view in the torture room are defined variously as 'out of focus', 'deformed' and 'foggy'. If the screenplay stresses the unreliability of the witness' gaze and relies on the screams of pain of the tortured to represent the horror, Rossellini's direction instead breaks the rules of verisimilitude to confront the traumatic images directly.[11] Through the short-sighted eyes of Don Pietro, the camera sees with absolute clarity. Bergmann's order to Don Pietro – 'Look, priest, look!' – becomes a gesture of responsibility directly transmitted from the director and forced on the spectator. The act of looking is based on an ethical necessity, and the moral obligation can become unbearable, as in the case of Marina, who faints at the sight of the body of the man she reported to the Nazis.[12] The challenge that Manfredi continuously poses to his persecutors through his stare is the same that Rossellini reproduces for his viewer. If the hero has, as is traditional, a proud stare, the director performs above all the moral duty of not averting his gaze.[13]

This confrontation with trauma obviously does not get in the way of the task of representation and the symbolic meaning of the scene, which occur without ostentation. In 1954, interviewed by Truffaut, Rossellini appeared slightly annoyed by the allegorical reading of his film that was becoming increasingly combined with a realistic reading.

> According to the latest rumour, my films are 'symbolical'. Now, I know all too well that the tortured communist in *Open City* can bring to mind the face of Christ on the cross, that the child in *Germany Year Zero* dies to save the world, and that Irene's itinerary in *Europe '51* evokes the Way of the Cross. But I have always planned it so that this symbolic dimension would come 'after' the movie, 'in addition to it', as a second, richer meaning.
>
> (Truffaut 1954: 3)

In other words, it comes about as an almost natural characteristic of what is represented, which seems to hide a 'command' (in Rancière's words[14]) from above and is led by the demands of the storyline, as in the example of the morality play that is often cited in scholarship on the film. The symbolism of *Rome, Open City* seeks direct embodiment in reality without imposing upon it or subjugating it to the rigidity of a pre-conceived and contrived design. The rapid images of the film, removed from any settled contemplation, are based on the seemingly natural balance of allegorical construction found in the dynamic of objects and events, rather than needing to be added by the overbearing gaze of the director, which aims to be within the world and not above or in front of it. The realistic and mythical patterns are thus seemingly inseparable.

Already in 1946 the art critic Meyer Shapiro read the film as a 'Familiar Christian Legend' based on the iconography and meanings of the characters' names (1946: 312–13). In his view, the martyrdom of the priest and the communist recalls that of the apostles Peter and Paul. This Catholic thread is further explained in Manfredi's *nom de guerre*, Giovanni Episcopo (John Bishop), which, besides evoking a work by Gabriele D'Annunzio, explicitly refers to the figure of the bishop. In this manner the persecution of

11. The shots in which the spectator is pushed to see the partisan leader in the torture room through the eyes of the priest (point of views 522 and 524), are unrealistic according to the parameters of verisimilitude almost always adopted by Rossellini in the rest of the film (Bruni 2006: 165).

12. Throughout the film Marina almost always makes use of a mediating tool between herself and reality: the mirror as a means for narcissistic vision, the telephone as an object linked to lack-of-presence, drugs as distance from the world. The encounter with Manfredi's body replaces her suddenly in an unbearable reality.

13. The ethics of Rossellini's gaze in the face of his characters' tortured bodies is the interpretative focus of Karl Schoonover. Schoonover analyses in detail the killings in *Rome, Open City* and *Paisàn*, proposing a

> new transcultural protocol of spectatorship: images of physical abuse, political torture, and execution supply a venue through which these films promote looking as a form of political engagement. By placing ocular witnessing at the center of their narratives, these films seek to transform seeing from a passive state of consumption into a powerful means of moral reckoning.
>
> (2012: 110)

14. For Rancière, who counters the ontological interpretation of

anti-fascists is assimilated into the persecution of Christians during the Roman Empire. For Rossellini, therefore, to look at death means to confront its representation in the history and myths of Catholicism, which have strongly marked Italian culture, irrespective of political ideologies. It is not by chance that one of the models most cited by the critics in the torture scene is a painting by the communist painter Renato Guttuso,[15] who, in 1941, produced *Crocifissione*, in which the death of Christ serves as a timeless symbol of contemporary massacres. Christian iconography provides the mythical model of the martyr, understood in its original meaning as witness to present horrors. In *Rome, Open City*, testimony is a key theme that includes both the eyes of the camera and of the film's characters. The three killings take place in different spaces and times that emblematically involve different social subjects on each occasion.

The first, Pina's, takes place in the middle of the street and is observed by the crowd of passersby. The scene, defined by Adams Sitney as a sort of 'Odessa steps' for Rossellini and Italian post-war cinema, involved a whole community (Sitney 1995: 41). Its multiple gaze is reproduced by the film camera, which at times seems to identify with Francesco's point of view as he is taken away in the German vehicle, and at times abruptly switches direction to an indefinite spot in the crowd. Unconcerned with the mistakes in the connection of the frames,[16] Rossellini represents a gaze as excited and tumultuous as the event portrayed, in which 'who looks, and the thing being looked at, character and surrounding space, are all one' (Aprà 1995: 11–12). Death takes root in the womb of the city; it spreads into the air like an explosion from which the debris is collected. Pina's death is thus a public death that is elevated to a final consecration: this is how one can read the gesture of the priest who carries her corpse. Don Pietro goes from performing a false last ritual – administered to the old Sor Biagio hit by a pan – to an authentic extreme unction, celebrating, as Adams Sitney writes, Pina's funeral in the middle of the street (1995: 42). One of the most beautiful interpretations of the sequence of Pina's death is offered by Jacques Rancière, who, recalling the comparison proposed by Rivette between Rossellini's gaze and Matisse's pencil-line (Rivette 1955: 15–19), relates Pina's 'fall' to that of a bird on the clear background of the street. In the curve of her movement he sees an arabesque, and in the arabesque he identifies the 'happiness of this image that condenses the relationships and tensions of the film without symbolizing them, without identifying them with something other than the interplay of black and white that defines the filmic image'. In this way the framing becomes

> a moment of grace in the strongest, Pauline sense of the term […] In this instance, it marks the exact concordance of an ethical upsurge and an aesthetic trace. Beyond every political determination, the priest and the communist engineer both die without talking for the sake of this pure original élan, for the absolute gratuity or generosity of this liberty.
>
> (Rancière 2006: 127)

The original and gratuitous leap is represented, according to Rancière, bending the narrative dynamics of verisimilitude and pushing beyond the simple romantic motivations that drive the character's race towards death.

In the scene of Manfredi's torture and killing, freedom no longer presents itself in the shape of the pictorial arabesque, but is represented through the encounter-collision between the tormented flesh and the unbowed spirit or again, to use Rancière's words, through the dialectic of corporal and

Neorealism by André Bazin and Jean-Luc Godard, Rossellini 'surimpose au mouvement normal de l'enchaînement narratif un autre mouvement, commandé par une fable de la *vocation*'. The sequence of Pina's death responds to a 'dramaturgie de l'appel' rather than a 'vision "non manipulée" des choses'; it is the result of a 'dramaturgie qui fait correspondre l'extrême de la liberté du personagge avec son absolue sujétion à un commandement'. Rancière conclusively underlines the dialectic created between 'l'impouvoir' of the characters, evoked by Deleuze, and 'l'excès de pouvoir' of the auteur with respect to his material (Rancière 2006: 13).

15. Renato Guttuso was, alongside other communists such as Celeste Negarville – used as a model for the character of Manfredi – Giorgio Amendola, Mario Alicata and Pietro Ingrao, a visitor of Sergio Amidei's home during the Nazi occupation of Rome.

16. The 'mistakes' have been analysed closely by Chris Wagstaff (2007: 170–71). Wagstaff defines the death of Pina 'unrealistic' in comparison to the narrative and dramaturgical logic. In his text 'Falling Bodies', Rancière highlights 'the improbabilities that abound in this realist manifesto' (2006: 125) and considers the sequence of Pina's death 'highly improbable' (2006: 126) from the point of view of her movements.

incorporeal. Abandoning the public limelight, death becomes a private ordeal, enclosed between the expressionist shadows and lights of the German commando, with an enforced witness: the priest. In this case it is Don Pietro's point-of-view shots and the shot-reverse shot between the characters that provide the conflicted logic of representation, grounded in their bodily presence. The 'confession' that the Germans want to force from Manfredi is witnessed by the priest and ends with final absolution, a ritual of blessing and extreme unction. The priest once again carries the body of the sacrificial victim and recomposes it, closing the eyelids of the disfigured face.

Until this moment, Don Pietro has been alongside the heroes' gestures, sanctifying them. The last part of the film closes the circle of killings through a decisive transfer. The priest finds himself in an isolated clearing at the edge of the city, in the light of dawn, ready for his own execution and alone in front of his persecutors. His silent heroism would go uncelebrated if it were not for the parish boys suddenly appearing behind the fence, whistling to him. Thus, his killing also assumes the form of a 'death with spectators', reintroducing the key figure of the witness. Don Pietro's death presents itself as his legacy to new generations who will only be able to move towards a new future by keeping their eyes open in the face of trauma. Rossellini broke the logic of verisimilitude in the *mise-en-scène* of each of the three killings through the concordance between shots, highlighting the strength and importance of the gaze, which, free of dramaturgical obligations, moves freely from author to character and from author to spectator.

THE FIGURE OF THE SCAPEGOAT, BETWEEN GRIEF AND REBIRTH

Since its release *Rome, Open City* has been interpreted, particularly abroad, as a film that symbolized the will to rebuild Italian society after the long night of fascism and the massacres of the war. Pina, Manfredi and Don Pietro not only represent the heterogeneous political components of the resistance, but the innocent victims upon whom the new republican order is founded. They perform the function of the scapegoat, as described by René Girard in his anthropological studies (1972, 1982).

Every society, both primitive and modern, is founded – according to his interpretation – on an act of ritualization of violence, an institutional sacrifice around which a community gathers itself and strengthens its bonds. Among the elements that trigger persecutory forces, Girard places at the forefront the crisis of a cultural and institutional order that results in the crumbling of the rules on which the social pact is established. In the Italy of 1945, still in the midst of chaos, the sacredness of the victims of the resistance and the lynching of fascist enemies represented the two violent poles around which would be built the foundations of the new post-war society.

Rome, Open City not only uses the principle of the scapegoat to guide its reading of historical events, but positions it directly in the figurative structure of the text, giving it explicit metaphorical value. The scene of the sheep being butchered by the Nazis symbolically articulates the passage from the killing of Pina to that of Manfredi and Don Pietro. Filtered through the Gospels, the image of the scapegoat transforms itself into that of Agnus Dei (the lamb of God). According to Girard, the great novelty of Christianity consists of eliminating any motivation to persecutory violence, relegating it to the subconscious and irrational. It is in this way that the Gospels explain the scapegoat mechanism – at the core of many ancient Greek myths – recognizing the victim's innocence. In *Rome, Open City* this process is displayed in an almost didactic manner:

the abused flesh and the words of the martyrs – in the case of the priest – reproduce the dynamics of Christ's immolation. The victims are subjected to a persecution that seems to have no other cause than a blind, unknown destructive passion, cloaked in the semblance of racial and cultural supremacy. Each death is observed through forms of grieving, which reproduce a kind of celebration of the funeral rite, entrusted to the acts and gaze of the witnesses. *Rome, Open City* not only looks death in the eye; it proposes its reconstruction and projection in collective memory. In this sense, the film performs a function similar to that which Freud attributed to grief: the pushing of discourse from the private to the social dimension (1917: 239–58). The memory of martyrs must be established, transmitted and developed to channel the living energies of society in a new, invested direction.

According to most interpretations, the film's final image particularly symbolizes life that is born out of the experience of loss and death. The youths, eyes hurt by the vision of Don Pietro's murdered body, move away – in the words of Pier Paolo Pasolini,

> in the sharp light of an unknown Rome / the Rome just emerged from death / surviving with all the splendid joy of glistening in light / full of its immediate destiny of an epic after-war, of the years / brief and worthy of an entire existence.
>
> (1961: 62, our translation)

One hears in the words of Pasolini, writing in the 1950s, regret for a season of great hopes – all unfulfilled – which are usually associated with the last image of *Rome, Open City*. If one read this frame separately from the inspiration of the time, after which disillusionment followed, one would find oneself on a path whose destination is unclear. In this representation of the youths' lives 'emerging from death' in the light of the dawn, there is no triumphant projection. The last image communicates, rather, an incorporation of pain and a *suspension* of the director's gaze, who contemplates the youths' descent from Golgotha while they make their way back to the city.[17]

The future is left out of the film, as will be the case in the other two works of the War Trilogy. The last frames of *Paisan* are dedicated to the water that has engulfed the partisans' bodies. The epilogue of *Germany, Year Zero* shows the child protagonist's body after suicide, mercifully carried by a woman while the camera lifts to focus on a tram passing through the city's ruins. Death heralds a rebirth, a sort of resurrection, but Rossellini's eye never moves beyond the threshold of martyrdom and grief.

17. The film ends with a view of Rome, as in the beginning. Many critics have highlighted the symbolic character attributed to Saint Peter's Basilica, the most recognizable in the urban landscape, chatacterized by a pervasive and encompassing Catholicism. In a review of the time the writer Antonio Marchi defined the closing image of Rome a vision 'suspended in the air', and reads the children's walk towards the city as their return to 'the comforting hug of a wounded mother' (1946). In an essay dedicated to the figure of defeat and loss in *Rome, Open City* both on a political and on an expressive level, Michael P. Rogin writes that the final frame 'offers neutral sadness rather than any principle of hope' and 'suggests an old return more than a new beginning'. The symbol of Saint Peter's Basilica that 'replaces Don Pietro' is interpreted almost as a re-establishment of old powers that will characterize the future of the Italian republic (Rogin 2004: 131–60).

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