Basilicata and Southern Italy Between Film and Ecology

Edited by
Alberto Baracco · Manuela Gieri

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To all South(s) of the world.
To our South, imagined, encountered, lived.

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: For a New Ecology of the Gaze in Contemporary Italian Cinema

Manuela Gieri

Toward South

Over the past few decades, as we have entered the new millennium, Italian cinema has undergone a fairly apparent transformation, and yet one that was somewhat announced in the early 1990s. If we were to try and give a panoramic picture of such national cinema in this new stage of its development, we would have to observe a frequent tendency to rewrite space, both the one we inhabit in a difficult daily relationship between inside and outside, city and country, culture and nature, and the one we conceive as a generally termed Southern space of the world in its diverse articulations, as landscape and as environment in both natural and cultural terms. Then again, as Antonio Costa pointedly observes:

> Film's gaze onto the landscape is one mediated by constantly changing cultural, artistic, and social models. Contemporarily, cinema contributes to the

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> productions of new perceptive models connected to the specific properties of the medium (technique, language) and to the evolution of the cinematographic institution in the diverse political, social and cultural contexts. In the movies and thanks to the movies, landscape is continuously re-invented. (Costa 2006, 317–18)

Thus, such reinvention and true rewriting of space also has to do with a general reassessment of time, and this has often provoked a thorough rethinking of narrative structure with a necessary overcoming of traditional notions of genre, characterization, and so on. Thus, Italian cinema has revitalized itself and produced a number of *nontraditional* narrations that often seem to be delving and flourishing on all that had been discharged before as useless, unimportant, irrelevant—basically, a waste.

The transformation in form and content that a significant segment of contemporary Italian cinema is experiencing imposes a thorough renewal of the manners in which we think about and approach Italian film and its evolution over time. Accordingly, a chance is offered by a meaningful and useful encounter between Meridian thought (Cassano 1996) and ecocriticism (Willoquet-Maricondi 2010; Iovino and Oppermann 2012; Baracco 2018a; Baracco 2018b): in the first instance, the attempt is to identify ways to bypass the binary opposition between North-South as well as the one between West-East, while ecocriticism is a critical approach that applies to literary and filmic objects the findings of scientific environmentalism, thus giving centrality to categories such as "place" and "environment" that are pivotal for cinema and its complex system of signification. Such categories become even more substantial in a cinematic tradition that has forever tried, and still tries, to contribute and shape a national identity over a physically and culturally fragmented territory, and often has done so by promoting a fairly falsified picture of both place and environment. Notably, such filmic tradition is perhaps only now overcoming all the binary conceptions upon which it has been trying, uselessly, to construct such a univocal and shared form of collective recognition.

Indeed, beginning with unification, the history of our nation has been scarred by a painful search for identity, and Italian cinema has been and, to a certain extent, still is at the service of such grueling journey, since in our country, a film has been immediately conceived "as a form of expression close to, and intimately interwoven with life" (De Gaetano 2018, 9). As the journey continued in the aftermath of World War II, and as a mark of its modernity, Italian cinema relinquished action in favor of wandering and

visionary characters whose gaze has produced, however, an often picturesque and mostly contrived portrayal of the country, at times adopting a comedic-parodic or even grotesque mode, and at others, a melodramatic-realistic one (Gieri 1995; Brunetta 2020). Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, largely due to the many social and political transformations the country experienced in the late 1960s and the 1970s, and yet even the collapse of the Berlin Wall and of our First Republic, things have changed when a meaningful segment of Italian cinema seemed to be launching the search for a new and more *ecological gaze*, so to speak, and thus one no longer informed by the binary logic that had, for decades, produced artificial dichotomous juxtapositions—man versus woman, center versus periphery, North versus South, and so on. Consequently, more often than not, and especially since 2000, the outcome would favor forms of crossbreeding of documentary, fiction, myth, tragedy, and so on, somehow bringing to realization the "impure cinema" André Bazin auspicated in his *Qu'est-ce que le cinema?* (Bazin 1979, 119–42; Tucci 2019, 115). Such constant border-crossing between genres frequently finds both a literal and a metaphorical dimension, and produces a political and methodological tension that informs a thorough rethinking of the complex relationship between reality and the Real (in Lacanian terms) in filmic representation, as well as a reconsideration of individual and collective spaces (De Caro and Ferraris 2012; Ferraris 2012; Pagliardini 2016; Tucci 2019; Guerrini, Tagliani, and Zucconi 2009).

Moving, however, from the early 1990s and from such films as Gianni Amelio's *Il ladro di bambini* (*The Stolen Children*, 1992), Pasquale Pozzessere's *Verso Sud* (*Going South*, 1992), Gabriele Salvatores's *Sud* (South, 1993), or even Silvio Soldini's *Un'anima divisa in due* (*A Soul Split in Two*, 1993), to the 2000s and works such as Rocco Papaleo's *Basilicata Coast to Coast* (2010), Francesco Munzi's *Anime nere* (*Black Souls*, 2014), Edoardo De Angelis's *Indivisibili* (*Indivisible*, 2016), two films directed by the D'Innocenzo brothers, *La terra dell'abbastanza* (*Boys Cry*, 2018) and *Favolacce* (*Bad Tales*, 2020), as well as a little and yet intriguing film by Giulio Base, *Bar Giuseppe* (*Bar Joseph*, 2019), and Emma Dante's outstanding *Le sorelle Macaluso* (*The Macaluso Sisters*, 2020), this introductory chapter aims to open a deep and critical reflection on the ways in which, over the past thirty years, a relevant segment of Italian cinema has tried to renegotiate and rewrite the very notions of South and periphery. Indeed, it does so by pursuing a new *ecology of the gaze*, one that finds in impurity and imperfection its closeness to

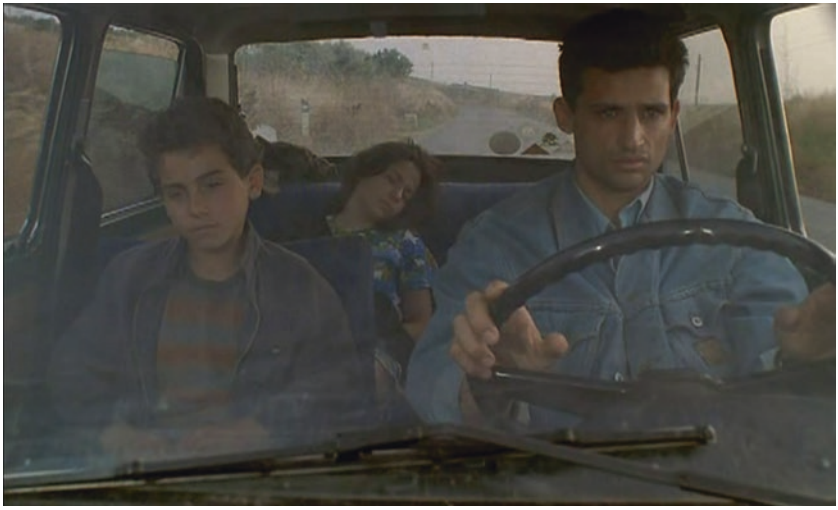

Fig. 1.1 Toward South (*Il ladro di bambini*, Amelio 1992)

reality—and, thus, a novel clarity. Such renegotiation has also necessarily implied a rethinking of century-old binary oppositions (i.e., time/space, culture/nature, and more) in the attempt to redraw the landscape as a true expression of a communal time and space, of a shared culture, or the failure thereof (Fig. 1.1).

In 1992, Gianni Amelio released *Il ladro di bambini*, his greatest commercial success, and a work that also obtained the Grand Prix of the Jury upon its presentation at Cannes. The film tells the appalling story of eleven-year-old Rosetta and nine-year-old Luciano, the children of internal migrants from Sicily. They live in the dismal housing projects of Milan, and face prejudice; their mother is unemployed and their father has long since abandoned them. In the time prior to the beginning of the tale, the mother has hired her daughter out as a prostitute; thus, in the movie's forceful opening, the authorities raid the place and arrest the mother and a client. The children are then destined to a Catholic orphanage in Civitavecchia, near Rome. Two carabinieri, the rookie Antonio (played by Enrico Lo Verso) and an older man named Grignani, are assigned the thankless task of escorting the children to their destination by train. However, Grignani walks out on Antonio at the train station in Bologna, leaving him to complete the task alone. As the journey unfolds, the

children are unruly, often fighting or running off in different directions. Luciano is sickly, does not eat much, and appears to be aphasic, while Rosetta is cynical, rebellious, and manipulative. Once they arrive at the orphanage in Civitavecchia, the priest in charge tells Antonio that the children cannot stay because Rosetta's medical record is missing: the suspicion is that they are using this motive as a pretext because of her background as a prostitute. Thus, the three characters travel in search of another place while facing the cynicism and contempt of a country that has clearly lost its sense of community. Such communal sentiment seems to be retrieved in their lives and in the narrative once they arrive at the home of Antonio's sister in Calabria, where the whole family is celebrating a young girl's First Communion. Tragically, the moment of relief is shattered when a woman recognizes Rosetta and exposes her grim past to the other guests. Humiliated and ashamed, the girl dashes away, and Antonio, who at this point has developed a deep compassion for the two children, drives them to the ferry terminal at the Strait of Messina. Once on the boat, for the first time, Luciano speaks and engages in a conversation with the carabiniere, his new hero since Antonio's grandmother had shown him a picture of a little Antonio dressed as Zorro. When the ferry lands, instead of driving them to the orphanage in Gela, the carabiniere takes a detour to Marina di Ragusa where, the next day, they go to the beach: in a mesmerizing segment, he teaches Luciano to swim in the enchanted blue ocean, and thus, finally manages to forge a true bond with both children (Fig. 1.2).

Later, in Noto, Antonio tries to help two French female tourists who have been pickpocketed. However, upon arriving at the police station, he is wrongfully accused of not following orders, but that is not the worst of it: he is also charged with kidnapping and abusing the children. Consequently, he is forced to hand in his warrant card pending a court martial. After several hours, late into the night, they are all released, and Antonio drives the children to Gela. Visibly upset, he says very little during the journey, and having nearly reached their final destination, Antonio pulls over to a deserted and abandoned site where the three of them fall asleep in the car. At dawn, the children awaken and walk off to the side of the road, where they sit side-by-side, sunk in dismay. The camera records their abysmal solitude, offering the viewer a medium close-up of their backs before resorting to darkness and the end titles.

With *Il ladro di bambini*, Gianni Amelio has not-so-implicitly attempted to provide a sincere although unquestionably harsh portrayal of

Fig. 1.2 Antonio and Luciano bathing in the blue ocean (*Il ladro di bambini*, Amelio 1992)

contemporary Italy and its many contradictions, and he has done so by paying tribute to neorealism and its ethical message. Indeed, *Il ladro di bambini*, among other things, denounces the failure of the utopian dream for a better and fairer society that was at the foundation of the neorealist project. The film advances its argument by dialoging, directly and indirectly, with two neorealist masterpieces, Rossellini's *Paisà* (*Paisan*, 1946) and De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948). Like the latter, Amelio's film denounces a historical and yet simultaneously an existential condition. However, while in De Sica's work such a denunciation was *plural*, as indicated by the title itself of the film, here, the thief is unmistakably *one*—in fact, the Italian title of the movie literally reads: "the thief of children." While in the 1948 film, what is stolen is a bike, an object,—or better said, a means of production, in Amelio's 1992 movie, at first a childhood is stolen by a ravaging and cruel adult environment, and later two children are *stolen* in order to be saved. Unmistakably, though, the movie comes to register the failure of such an attempt and, thus, the

ultimate defeat of the ideals of social change and renewal as well as human solidarity that animated both Italian resistance and neorealist cinema. However, it must be noted that, through the story of a father and a son, De Sica also narrated both the failure of the ideals that fostered the resistance and the dismal reality of the years of reconstruction (Gieri 1995, 206–7). Hence, the hope for change and for a bright future that closed, for instance, Rossellini's 1946 film, *Paisà*, in De Sica's work, gives way to disillusionment and despair, and both feelings are somewhat amplified in Gianni Amelio's gripping portrayal of a destitute country where the boundaries between North and South, as well as center and periphery seem to have vanished—in favor of hopelessness and dystonia.

Even so, Gianni Amelio's tale of a meeting and an escape down South of three *lonely* individuals is also a journey of discovery, no matter how ultimately dismal: the discovery of a country that is a true reversal of Rossellini's *Paisà*. Where Rossellini's filmic tale moved from South to North following the Allied's *liberation* of Italy from Nazi-Fascist occupation, Amelio's journey moves from North to South, recording the ultimate deconstruction of the utopian dream of a unified and sympathetic country. Furthermore, if in Rossellini's journey true communication is ultimately built amongst the various cultural and linguistic identities at play, in *Il ladro di bambini*, no communication or understanding grows between the three protagonists and the surrounding human environment. On the contrary, as the journey progresses, the distance between them and the others merely increases, and the inability to communicate with the outside world brings the tale to its dreary conclusion. Indeed, Antonio, Rosetta, and Luciano are represented as a strange and yet coherent and *alternative* community, since even at as the film's opening, they are all *personaggi fuori chiave* (characters out of key) (Gieri 1995, 207): the two children forced to grow up too fast by a corrupted and dismal social reality, and the *grown-up* cop constrained to be a child by a system that requires him not to think and therefore not to make choices in life. As the movie progresses, the transformation is twofold: the children regain access to childhood, and the young man travels a journey toward maturity. A true sense of solidarity grows between the two children and the carabiniere: they are three strangers who, for a brief span of time, seem to be able to construct an alternative family group, and thus an alternative cultural construct that finds fertile ground in a return to South.

As we know, in the 1930s and 1940s children were the privileged subject of several neorealist works, both literary and cinematic, and,

interestingly enough, it is through or rather thanks to children that such a utopian dream for a new future returns to our silver screens, as in the 1990s, emphasis is once again placed on childhood and adolescence. However, as the country has undergone decades of corruption and exploitation of its outer and inner landscape, it is now necessary to steal children and youngsters from it, bringing them to a virgin and untouched environment where they can regain their place as our last hope for a better future. Such an implied positive horizon is, however, once again denied to the spectator, and Amelio's *Il ladro di bambini* ends on a deserted and dismal Southern road with no conclusive statement but a definite sense of detachment. At the end of Amelio's journey, no solution is to be found, as in the closing sequence the children are physically and visually separated even from the carabiniere, and all three of them are placed at an unrecoverable distance from everything and everybody else, perhaps ultimately recording the inability—or rather, the impossibility—of remapping a country that seems to have lost a veritable sense of itself.

Indeed, with this work, Gianni Amelio also came to define his personal style and method of filmmaking. The movie records the progressive transition of the director's poetics from a fairly dry realism to a participated gaze upon the world that makes use of a crossbreeding of styles and genres, while consistently granting a particular attention to interpersonal dynamics and human relationships within a marked framework of sociopolitical investigation (Caminati 2006, 597). The theme of the journey as an exploration of a gruesome physical, social, and emotional landscape is here presented in radical forms (Caminati 2016; Rascaroli 2003; Nicoletto 2012), as the movement toward South records the failure of a utopian dream for a better country and a fairer society.

Unquestionably, the rewriting of both landscape and environment as well as the crossbreeding of both stylistic registers and codified genres becomes a trademark of most Italian movies from the 1990s onward, as is somehow championed by Gabriele Salvatores's *Sud*, a 1993 film that finds its central theme in survival. The story unfolds in a single location, a small town in the Southern region of Puglia, and comprises a brief span of time, a few hours. The spatial dimension of the movie becomes increasingly claustrophobic as a group of social outcasts seizes a polling station and progressively barricade themselves against the outside world. Their desperate venture is an act of revolt against the generalized corruption of an age-old electoral system where votes are stolen or faked, a system that has brought to power the same political parties for decades and thus provoked

the exploitation and impoverishment of the Southern and poorer part of the country. Elia, Michele, and Munir, a Northern African man, are led to revolt by Ciro (Silvio Orlando), an unemployed union leader who, in his alienation and diversity, possesses the gift of special sight. Through his eyes, we are offered an estranged gaze upon the surrounding world, a peculiar meeting of fiction and reality as things are distorted and action is slowed down. The four characters are a strange bundle of human destinies who attempt and contrast a dominant discourse in life and society in order to build a different spatial and time dimension where all diverse linguistic and cultural identities may live together in reciprocal respect through a fruitful process of mutual interaction (Gieri 2020a, 470).

The film itself is characterized by linguistic contamination as the director pursues a fluid movement from one genre to another, especially when Ciro's gaze affects the diegesis of the text. Exemplary is the moment when Ciro exits the polling station to meet the head of police and discuss the situation. Infused with his desire to experience a moment of glory, the scene is shot as if it were a dramatic duel in a classical Western, such as Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* (1952), and yet, the scene is also shot in slow motion to emphasize its subjective quality. Linguistic and cultural contamination is also stressed by the peculiar musical score, which employs different and occasionally divergent themes as well as fine examples of recent Italian rap music. Interestingly enough, this pursuit of contamination, in linguistic and cultural terms, takes place in the South (Gieri 2020a, 470–71).

In the 1990s, to confront a foreign culture, to draw alternative existential paths, and, thus, to survive, become recurrent themes as our cinema attempts to reflect and comment upon a society in far too rapid change. The reality of immigration and, thus, the potential contamination of a familiar culture by alien ones are new concerns to a relatively young nation that has not yet uncovered its own identity or somehow registers the uselessness of even trying to look for one. These thematic elements are featured in several films, such as Silvio Soldini's *Un'anima divisa in due* (*A Soul Split in Two*, 1993), where a neurotic Milanese desperately falls in love with an intriguing and equally enigmatic *romanì* (Romani) girl. In Soldini's film, the encounter of two thoroughly different cultures, a Northern and a generically Southern one, is not only the theme but also the structuring principle of the narrative, and the movie is virtually divided in two segments that are stylistically quite different from one another. The opening section is dedicated to Pietro Monti, the head of security at a

large downtown Milan department store. Originating from his distorted and somewhat ill vision, the narrative is fragmented, characterized by swift and accelerated editing, as glimpses of random scenes run through his head. He gazes at an alienating and alienated city life in bewilderment, staring at the bustling people and the hurried pace of contemporary life. Upon his meeting the young Romani who has been stealing in the department store, the film soon shifts to the narrative tempo and representation of space, characteristic of Romani culture. Fast-paced cutting is replaced by longer shots and the slower rhythm typical of vagrant cultures. The unstoppable process of contamination between the two, however, brings an irreparable feeling of loss, as the film seems to be still dominated by those binary oppositions that have, for decades, tainted our filmic representations of space.

Increasingly, however, linguistic and cultural contamination becomes a means to the realization of an *impure* cinema that attempts to remap the moral and physical geography of a country that has yet to retrieve its own identity. In order to proceed to such a remapping of our physical and emotional landscape, one that would give us back a *true* picture of the environment we live in and would forever abandon the former artificial and stereotypical portrayals of our homeland, the new Italian cinema, which saw its beginning in the early 1990s, identifies in the meeting of fiction and documentary, of myth and tragedy, the way of access to a new and more *ecological* gaze, one that only the *other* from oneself may truly offer. This is the case of *Il ladro di bambini*, *Sud*, and *Un'anima divisa in due,* and I believe that this is now a consolidated tendency as testified by numerous films made in the 2000s, such as *Favolacce*, *Bar Giuseppe*, and *Le sorelle Macaluso.*

Interestingly enough, the story narrated in the D'Innocenzo brothers' *Favolacce* unravels in a kind of non-place, a neighborhood in Rome called Spinaceto. It is a fairly anonymous residential district in the Eternal City that has already found representation in Nanni Moretti's *Caro Diario* (*Dear Diary*), a 1993 film with which the so-called father of a generation of filmmakers who came to début in the late 1970s ended the first season of his filmmaking and opened a new one (Gieri 1995, 232). The movie is divided into three segments; the first shows Moretti himself touring around the city on his *lambretta* and closes with the director offering the viewer an homage to Pier Paolo Pasolini by stopping at the place where the great Italian poet, filmmaker, and intellectual was killed. In the D'Innocenzo brothers' film, such a reference is not merely coincidental

since, on the one hand, Moretti's work has always been committed to social, political, and cultural critique and change and can therefore be defined as a "cinema of resistance" (Gieri 2020b, 377), while on the other hand, Pier Paolo Pasolini was, perhaps, the first Italian director to identify the Italian suburbia and the proletariat as necessary points of departure for a novel and more sincere representation of the country, as well as the first poet of a truly impure cinema.

Favolacce is a dark fairy tale that seems at first to recount the story of fairly *normal*, or rather, *normalized* Italian neighborhoods where life appears to flow with serenity. In such a seemingly reassuring environment, however, tensions emerge between parents and children, as the latter, even though extraordinarily diligent in school, feel terribly lonely and unhappy. Underneath the hypocrisy and even the cruelty of this bourgeois social environment, there lies an unforeseen but furious rage that is soon to explode. Such an explosion eventually bursts forth physically and metaphorically, into the narrative, although it is thoroughly anticipated by the grotesque and horrific nature of family lunches and dinners that seem to anticipate the final outcome: something may indeed go wrong. What is exposed here, in the second feature film of the Roman brothers, is thus the failure of a capitalistic model of development that leaves the younger segment of society—and thus, the future of the country—thoroughly vulnerable. In this movie, the D'Innocenzo brothers' vision is almost iconoclastic, as what is ultimately disassembled and eventually destroyed are the very notions of "family" and "home." It is, unquestionably, a systematic destruction of what have been considered sacred icons in the making of our country.

A fairly different and intriguing tale, Giulio Base's *Bar Giuseppe* (2019) addresses the notions of family and home in its own way by connecting them to place and environment in a novel manner, as it unfolds in a rural and almost deserted region in the Southern part of Italy between Puglia and Basilicata. As the film opens, Giuseppe (Ivano Marescotti) runs a bar and the associated gas station with his wife, but when the latter dies, he is left alone with his two grown-up sons, Nicola, a baker, and Luigi, a junkie. Against the will of his remaining family, who would like him to sell both bar and gas station, Giuseppe decides to continue his activity and begins interviewing people to find a helper. From the African community that revolves around his establishment, there arrives Bikira (Virginia Diop), a charming but very young woman with a painful past. Slowly but surely, Giuseppe falls in love with the girl, and they marry, provoking a true

scandal in their little town, Bitonto. The scandal grows even bigger when Bikira is discovered to be pregnant, notwithstanding that they never made love. Although Giuseppe initially does not believe in her innocence, in the end, he feels there is no choice but to relinquish all of his defenses and prejudices. His decision to remain with Bikira leads the story to a happy ending, no matter how peculiar and unpredictable.

Significantly, in Hebrew, "bar Giuseppe" means "Giuseppe's son"; indeed, the film explores in a contemporary fashion the relationship between Giuseppe and Maria, and much more. Giuseppe is a hard-working man, simple and humble, a man of few words: in a time like ours, utterly boisterous and crammed with empty words, he remains still and silent. Nevertheless, his silences are compensated with his actions, and these actions build an alternative world made of solidarity, inclusiveness, and love. In practical terms, Bar Giuseppe is a crossroads of different destinies, a medley of skin colors, ages, and religious beliefs. Thus, this variegated humanity meets at Bar Giuseppe, and turns it into a place of communion and exchange. When Bikira arrives at the bar with all her baggage of pain and sorrow (she is a migrant who came to Italy on a boat after her parents were killed), she brightens up the place—and Giuseppe's life—with her pure beauty and astounding smile. She is capable of seeing what others fail to see in the old man's silence, and loves him unconditionally, without prejudice or resistance. Giulio Base's slow and caring camera movements record a love story that soon assumes a universal meaning since the ultimate moral of the story is the acceptance of the other from oneself. Such message is particularly relevant at a time when Italy is compelled to face its own prejudices and racism and, thus, the challenge of defining its own identity in new and unexpected ways, prompted by a process of cross-breeding that is, at this point in time, not only necessary but inevitable and just (Fig. 1.3).

Seven years after Via *Castellana Bandiera* (*A Street in Palermo*, 2013), Emma Dante's *Le sorelle Macaluso* brings to the screen the necessary and somber tale of five sisters—Antonella, Maria, Lia, Pinuccia, and Katia—who live in the city of Palermo, in an apartment they share with pigeons that represent their only means of subsistence. The picture narrates a life that unfolds at the margins of both city and history, in a solitude where nothing is admitted except for memories that are constantly activated by objects thrown together as memento of a past that is beyond reach. An adaptation of a 2014 theatrical *pièce* the author has brought to the stage several times, Dante wrote the screenplay with Elena Stancanelli and

Fig. 1.3 The actresses of *Le sorelle Macaluso* framed in the apartment

Giorgio Vasta, preserving the inner division in acts of the original (Rimini 2021) where the *fil rouge* is entrusted to the pigeons, in particular to the white ones that are so beloved by the youngest sister, the little Antonella.

The film is thus divided in three chapters corresponding to three different stages of the Macaluso sisters' lives: childhood and youth, marked by light and passions; adult life, characterized by dark tones, altercations, and misunderstandings; and old age, in which grayish tones and solitude dominate. Dante's narration accompanies the five protagonists along a life path where not all of them manage to endure in their dismal existence, and the pigeons, endlessly present, offer them material sustenance as well as a delicate and perfect symbolism for the desperate lives of the five women whose inability *to fly* is unquestionably determined by a social condition of profound distress that becomes a lethal sentence after Antonella's death in the first chapter of the story.

The five sisters are interpreted by twelve actresses so to register the transformations that the body undergoes in time when and if one of them

manages to resist. Indeed, the body is a central tenet of the tale, since it is on and in the body that one finds engraved the discontinuity determined by the passing of time. Furthermore, it is the body that prevents humans from flying (as pigeons can), and thus fulfilling their dreams. The body, hence, hopelessly brings us back to earth: ultimately, it is the weight of her body that makes Antonella fall and die. Indeed, the death of the youngest sister and, thus, her body's fall, mark the first discontinuity in the text in moving from young age to adulthood. Later, once again, the deterioration of a body due to illness and Maria's death provoke a new and painful discontinuity, leading the spectator to the third and last chapter of the narrative: the death of Lia—Lia who reads books, Lia the guilty one, Lia the crazy one, Lia who, in the end, closes down the apartment and the tale with her departure (Fig. 1.4).

The centrality of body and space becomes the true strength of this *kammerspielfilm*, imbued with the powerful influence of Dante's theatrical expertise on both as well as on the editing and the use of diversified fields in interior and exterior shooting. The focus on the body and its decay justifies the almost obsessive attention to proxemics, exalted by a skillful and touching use of the close-up along with crooked and unusual shots that record the inexorable progression of grief and destiny.

Fig. 1.4 The closing shot of the five sisters as they gaze at the ocean (*The Macaluso Sisters*, Dante 2020)

In this gripping narrative, however, time cannot modify the body's inescapable destiny. The tale begins in the 1990s and continues for approximately eight decades in accompanying the five protagonists along their life path, projecting itself within a twenty-first century that cannot be perceived as a feasable "future." At the end of the story, when the house empties and shows on its "body" signs of the years that unraveled inside, the feeling is undeniably that of not having ever abandoned the "present," a dilated time without history, without past or future. Space itself seems unchangeable throughout the narration, unveiling the signs of its transformations only in the sequence that precedes the poetic closure of the film: the shapes of pictures on the wallpaper; the hole in the wall, hidden behind an armchair, made by the girls many years prior because they wanted to see the ocean; as well as the many objects that record the different stages of their lives. In actuality, those signs of time passing are the marks of an eternal *presence*, of a true and veritable resistance: Emma Dante has defined their home as a body that contains other bodies, the begetter of the whole family (Musillo 2021). The apartment thus becomes the sixth protagonist of the story, and its existence accompanies the Macaluso sisters and the viewer from the beginning to the end, while our gazes on the five desperate sisters' lives are guided by an accurate and participated direction. Thus, in this quite astounding film, space is made into a true *material* body, a presence that participates in the narrative by resisting time and its many painful blows.

In *Le sorelle Macaluso*, besides the body of the apartment and those of the five protagonists of the tale, one also finds the light body of the pigeons, one that does not undergo the erosion of time and pain. In fact, the pigeons' flight accompanies the viewer to the final image of the film as it follows the gazes of Antonella, Maria, Lia, Pinuccia, and Katia, who stand in the sunlight, facing the ocean, their backs to the camera in a moving return of the past, of childhood and adolescence, and, thus, of the brilliant colors of a time filled with dream and hope.

Indeed, space here, as in most of the films discussed, is a landscape defined by the gaze, with its distances, latitudes, and constrictions; its multiplicity; its plurality. It is not an object that acquires meaning and function by being gazed upon but represents a body in transformation: looking at the world thus signifies a way to apprehend its complexity (Bagnoli 2003, 20). In Emma Dante's film, as in all those analyzed in this introduction to the volume, space is also an environment, the reflection of a phenomenal reality; as such, it stands for a knowledge upon which one elaborates

specific textual strategies. Thus, filmic representations are no longer the result of a clash between opposing instances (good/bad, North/South, woman/man, center/periphery, and so on); instead, they are reflections of the complexity of reality itself. They are the product of a no longer binary but finally plural experience, one that welcomes diversity and *uselessness* and recovers all that, for decades, has been excluded by cinematic representations of the Real in Italian filmmaking—the waste—and, thus, promotes a new ecology of our gaze.

In conclusion, it seems that all these films participate in a general tendency articulated by the very young Italian filmmakers to subvert traditional forms of cinematic representation by connecting with the pressing extra-diegetic concerns expressed by a society in transformation. Furthermore, they also connect to the healthiest segment of a certain "Italian filmmaking" that has conventionally advocated for the free contamination of traditional narrative strategies, a mode of discourse that is double-voiced, ambivalent, self-critical, and self-reflexive, and has constantly argued for an ecology of the gaze, one that would find its freedom and a novel purity in overcoming boundaries, physical and emotional, in time and space, and would finally bypass the binary logic within which, for decades, our cultural discourse has been entangled.

The so-called new Italian filmmaking, then, seems to have come to full awareness of the fact that in the age of the simulacra, in the time of the relentless substitution of the thing with the image, as well as of the absolute triumph of fiction over life itself (Baudrillard 1981), it is imperative to renegotiate the very notions of nation, home, and belonging, and thus to make an effort to cross social and political, and hence largely cultural borders. This is only possible by uncovering and reusing the *waste*, all that which was hidden and/or expelled from the picture of our country in previous decades.

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