

The Romanesque Beyond Literature. A Conversation With Roberto Andò

Edited by Roberto De Gaetano

The conversation explores the notion of the *romanesque* as an aesthetic category that, beyond the literature, transcends mimetic representation.

Through a dialogue intertwining theory and artistic practice, Roberto Andò retraces the emergence of the *romanesque* in Italian cinema – from Visconti to Antonioni, Fellini, and Bellocchio – up to his own films, and also his theatrical experience, where *romanesque* becomes a means of investigating reality, liberating the possible.

References to Barthes, Pasolini, Bakhtin, Girard, and Kundera frame the *romanesque*, beyond the literature, as an open form grounded in the invention of intercessory characters and the interplay of the tragic, comic, and political. In Andò's reflection and artistic practice, the *romanesque* is defined by the tension between the real and the imaginary, seemingly capable of opening up unprecedented vision of reality.

From Tragic Necessity to Romanesque Contingency

Roberto De Gaetano

The essay aims to investigate the transition from tragic necessity to *romanesque* contingency in Western narrative forms, from Greek tragedy to modern cinema. It examines how the tragic, grounded in moral and ontological necessity, evolves into the contingent structure of the *romanesque*, analysing the shift from destiny-bound action to the freedom of possibility. The *romanesque* transforms tragic structure into contingent action, exploring human finitude and freedom through imaginative possibilities: the tragedy of reality is no longer determined by an inevitable link to a predestined necessity.

Fragmentation of the Subject and Crisis of Transcendence

Rossella Catanese

Forty years on, the cinema of Federico Fellini and David Lynch embodies

the same obsession: that for the “novelistic,” understood not as a genre, but as a category of the spirit in crisis. The essay explores the representation of subject fragmentation and the crisis of transcendence in Federico Fellini’s *La dolce vita* (1960) and David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive* (2001), examined comparatively. Drawing on Lukács, Bakhtin, and Steiner, the study traces the transition from modernity to postmodernity as a shift in the relationship between self, world, and meaning, showing how auteur cinema inherits the novel’s crisis. In Fellini, the novelistic unfolds as the frustrated search for a lost totality; in Lynch, it becomes an ontological and narrative principle of fragmentation that embodies the postmodern logic of simulacra. The analysis also focuses on the role of sound and image as perceptual agents of disintegration, revealing cinema as a critical form of thought that transforms the loss of transcendence into an aesthetic and anthropological condition of modernity.

The Architecture of Vision in Beppe Fenoglio’s Short Fiction

Mirco Roncoroni

Beppe Fenoglio’s short stories exhibit a cinematic narrative technique characterized by a dual framing process that is both ocular and linguistic. This essay seeks to elucidate the manifestation of the cinematic mode in Fenoglio’s short stories via an intermedial narratological framework, incorporating a comparative analysis with Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’avventura* (1960) and Marcel Carné’s *Le jour se lève* (1939). What intersections exist between literary and cinematic narrative systems? What cognitive predispositions and abilities make the reader a spectator before the page-screen? Special emphasis will be placed on the ocular representation of internal focalization and the enunciative concatenation in which verbal free indirect discourse shifts into a semi-subjective visual mode. The essay ultimately aims to examine the recurrence of motifs recognized by film theory - specifically windows, doors, and thresholds - that confer upon the character a distinct status of spectatoriality: perceiving rather than acting, liberated from the role of causal agent in narrative developments, and inclined towards visual mobility in time when limited to restricted spaces. These aspects make Fenoglio a neorealist interpreter in the Deleuzian sense.

Francesco Rosi and the Anti-Novelistic Path to Modernity

Matthieu Combe

Drawing on the theory of the novelistic, this article seeks to reassess the place of Francesco Rosi's investigative cinema within the history of cinematic modernity. Following Deleuze, the notion of the novelistic—and the strand of modernity associated with it, from Neorealism to the present—rests on a central concept (the figure of the *seer* or the author's *intercessor*) which is absent from Rosi's investigative films. This absence reveals a fundamental incompatibility between the nature of these investigative works and the neorealist matrix to which critical discourse has often linked them. Focusing on the complex status of the character and on the analytical form of inquiry that defines Rosi's work, this study aims to situate the Neapolitan filmmaker's investigative cinema within a form of modernity that is essentially non-novelistic, tending instead toward the category of essayistic cinema.

Novels of Life: Autobiographical Imagination in Contemporary Italian Cinema

Gabriele Guerrieri

The essay explores the romanesque as a mode through which contemporary Italian fiction cinema gives form to autobiographism. Beyond both the denial of cinema's autobiographical potential and the mere transposition of a literary model – the autobiographical novel – this cinema, by expanding the aesthetic and creative force of autobiographical imagination in the dialectic between memory and fiction, returns to the self the experience of its own contingency.

The Novelistic as a “Re-Enchantment” of the World in Michelangelo Frammartino

Andrea D'Ammando

In recent years, the theme of the “disenchantment” and “re-enchantment” of the world has become increasingly important in Italian and international debate. Due to an increasingly widespread perception of the crisis of the capitalist modernity project, the problem of disenchantment – understood as a phenomenon linked to the process of rationalisation that has affected social life and common experience at all levels – is now back in philosophical, sociological and anthropological thinking, almost a century after Weber's

theory, involving many scholars (from Stiegler to Latour to Federici, Consigliere and Rosa with the concept of “resonance”). Contemporary artistic practices have also been “infected” by this renewed interest. In this sense, one of the most significant examples in Italy is Michelangelo Frammartino. Indeed, in many of his works, the form of an “impersonal novel” seems to construct an effectively “re-enchanted” view of the world and the natural environment, which sees humans connecting and, in a certain sense, merging with animals and plants, and in which the image is saturated with landscape. From this point of view, in his cinematographic works – but also in his installations – the image becomes a “presence” to investigate the meaning of a world that “resonates” in its irreducible contingency.

Ellipses, fragmentation, repetition: Stéphane Brizé’s *Une vie*

Luca Venzi

Through a theoretical and analytical perspective, this essay examines Stéphane Brizé’s *Une vie* (2016), based on Maupassant’s first novel (1883). Framing the relationship between Maupassant’s novel and the film, the text focuses in particular on the extensive compositional work mobilised by the film through the systematic use of ellipsis and processes of fragmentation and repetition.

Romance Words/Modes: Godard’s *Weekend*

Gabriele Corna

Jean-Luc Godard’s *Weekend* (1967) marks a decisive turning point in his career. As the final film completed before the events of May 1968, it encapsulates a decade of cinematic experimentation and ideological radicalization. The film’s character construction exemplifies a structure aligned with the «romance mode,» a concept originally theorized by Northrop Frye and later refined by Remo Ceserani. This essay examines *Weekend* through one of Godard’s signature stylistic features – his use of literary references – thereby combining insights from literary criticism and film studies.

“Nowhere and Nothing”, or Wandering in *Wanda*

Maya Rebecca Fidelia Gargiulo

Catalysing the restlessness and uncertainty that characterised the Ame-

rican countercultural climate of the 70s, *Wanda* (Loden, 1970) traces an unpredictable and erratic existential trajectory whose novelty lies as much in the formal register of the film as in its extradiegetic resonance. Deviating towards narrative, stylistical and geographical margins and suburbia which look at transit as a primary mode of existence, the nomadic aesthetic pursued in Barbara Loden's first and only feature film exasperates the inefficacy of the subjectivisation processes codified by the American way of life, shedding a light on a spatial and emotional errancy which speaks to the female drift and disillusionment.

“A Swift Story Written in Bloody Letters”: Lizzani's *The Last Days of Mussolini*

Luca Prono

Carlo Lizzani's archive presents a diverse and rich array of documents that constitute the investigative specificity of his gaze on twentieth-century history. However, the extensive documentation from magazines, private memoirs, and photo-investigations has rarely been studied as a source for the director's film narratives, particularly those considered more “worthy” and “respectable” by contemporary critics. This essay aims to document the generative grafting of the novelistic onto historical research in *The Last Days of Mussolini* (1974) by considering three documents from Lizzani's archive which dismantle given hierarchies in themes and forms, combining and mixing different narrative registers in their investigation on the last days of the Fascist dictator. This very same novelistic character is detectable in Lizzani's film.

***Mondo* Movies Between Pseudo-Documentary and Novelistic Multi-Discursiveness**

Giuseppe Previtali

The *mondo movie* has long been a neglected genre, one that resists historical contextualization within canonical frameworks, mainly due to the problematic ideological positions it has conveyed and helped to shape. Beginning with *Mondo cane* (1961), this trend of sensationalist pseudo-documentaries was accused of perverting the documentary syntax in order to titillate the audience's instincts, eroding the boundaries of the visible and presenting questionable contents. Precisely because of their unclassifiability, these films have often been hastily dismissed as uninteresting objects, and

only recently scholars began to reconsider them as an early and problematic moment in the modern crisis of the relationship between image and referent.

Starting from these premises, this paper aims to show that the particular mode of subverting documentary strategies introduced by *mondo movies* is, in fact, only part of the issue. Drawing on Bachtin's theories, it will argue that the hybrid nature of the genre also stems from a peculiar reworking of novelistic forms, of which the *mondo* could be seen as a unique iteration.

Notes for a Murderer: Music and Identity in *American Psycho*

Lucrezia Lauteri

In Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991), music plays a structural role that reconfigures the novelistic form, interrupting the diegesis and revealing the fracture between critical language and narrative discourse. Patrick Bateman's commentaries on pop songs expose the absorption of his voice into the codes of mass culture, turning listening into a formal and repetitive gesture. In Mary Harron's film adaptation (*American Psycho*, 2000), music becomes a diegetic and performative element that ironizes and spectacularizes violence. In both works, music emerges as a space of tension between interiority, representation, and the form of narrative itself.

Anamorphosis of the Novelistic. Raul Ruiz's *Mysteries of Lisbon*

Marco Grosoli

In Raul Ruiz's films, literature has always been of paramount importance: unsurprisingly, his most testamentary and recapitulatory film (*Mysteries of Lisbon*) was adapted from a novel (by Camilo Castelo Branco). In my essay, I will focus on one single transformation of the original text as well as on its implications: whereas the novel was (as per Castelo Branco) drawn from a manuscript written by the book's protagonist/narrator in Brazil short before dying, the film has this protagonist/narrator die as a teenager, making the entire narrative one long pre-death delirium. The narrative closure chosen by Castelo Branco (obviously, the original novel's title itself is an unmistakable nod to Eugène Sue's feuilleton *Mystères de Paris*) establishes a strong tension between its own feuilleton-esque character and the novelistic, while the one chosen by Ruiz is turned into a non-opening, i.e. an opening that is only deceptive. In my essay, I will explain how and why this redefinition of the very contours of the original text's novelistic character is tantamount to a metahistorical stance: thereby, Ruiz is suggesting that all History is a

deceptive trompe-l'oeil engendered by a structurally unsolvable issue, namely the issue of *exchange* – which, as Pierre Klossowski (a writer whose importance in Ruiz's career could not be overestimated) knew very well, is first and foremost a theological issue.

The False and the Black Hole: On *Favolacce* by the D'Innocenzo Brothers

Alfredo Vitagliano

This article offers a formal and critical analysis of *Favolacce* (2020), examining its placement within the contemporary «New-New Italian Cinema» (Zagarrio, 2022) as a structurally subversive cinematic object. The film is defined as a *black hole* — an evocative figure for narrative collapse — that pulls the audience beyond the “horizon of normal events” to confront a domesticity marked by existential pathology. The analysis begins with the metanarrative incipit, which provides the key to an asphyxiating microcosm permeated by the grotesque and the absurd: «Quanto segue è ispirato a una storia vera. La storia vera è ispirata a una storia falsa. La storia falsa non è molto ispirata». This strategy immediately plunges the viewer into a dark abyss of sordid family tales, relying on a cognitive short-circuit that dismantles the automatism of perception (Šklovskij, 2017), achieving a necessary defamiliarization. The use of the unreliable voice-over further defines the film as a paradoxical thriller/sci-fi obsessively contaminated by the structural problem of the False and the most putrescent aspects of contemporary society. The central thesis investigates the film's formal strategies in depicting social dissolution. The expressive register is defined by the grotesque, analyzed through Bakhtin's theory of the «thickening of the real» and De Gaetano's model of the «black grotesque». This aesthetic choice is deployed when society lacks coherence for traditional narration, ultimately portraying the “monstrousness of an unchangeable world” and the resulting narrative breaking point. The film's “metamorphic romanesque” — a blend of literary allusion and formal expression — underscores the crisis of the bourgeoisie, with the poster's “living paper town” symbolizing the threshold between the literary and the contingent.

The Novelization of the Tragic: Kore'eda's *Monster*

Valentina Scarfò

The aim of this essay is to demonstrate how, in *Monster* (2023), the frag-

mentation of the narrative enacts a shift from the low-mimetic tragic mode to the novelistic. Through the repetition of the narrative, the film stages a gradual descent into inaction (De Gaetano 2019), culminating in the errant protagonism of the children. Starting from the neorealist tendency found in Hirokazu Kore'eda's cinema (Renda 2019), the essay will examine how the episodic and cyclical structure of the work corresponds to the polyphonic quality typical of the novelistic style (Bakhtin 1979). The representation of a constant becoming that results in the acquisition of a new awareness, a truth about the world. Such a process is made possible through the tripartite narration of the story, each version linked to a character whose perspective contributes to unveiling a concealed reality. Pragmatism and distrust, foundational elements of the tragic, characterize the figure of Saori, Minato's mother, marking the film low-mimetic mode; initially aligned with Saori, but later rendered unemployed and errant, is Mr. Hori, a character prone to contingency and chance, both of which introduce the novelistic; the children, Minato and Yori, embody errancy and clairvoyance, concluding the work with a rite of passage from the civil world to the natural one. This death-rebirth ritual signifies the final abandonment of the tragic, leading the characters not to a reconciliation with society, but with the self, thus aligning with a romantic perspective in which the novelistic and the comic converge (Frye 1967).

The Voice of Ghosts: War and Dreams in Kafka's *The Trial*

Antonio Rafele

In a close reading of Kafka's *The Trial*, this essay reconstructs the effects of war on an isolated individual, who observes himself from the outside. Rooms, stairs, doors, faces, disputes, and other anomalies are signs of constant and sudden shifts between dream and reality, which the reader witnesses without ever being able to reassemble the narrative threads. Why does war echo in the life of someone who is isolated and safe, far from the clamor of battle? Perhaps its seeds are found in the violence of public discourse? The senselessness of the accusation and the ensuing trial can only suggest the war that transcends and oppresses, compelling conformity through institutional mechanisms. An irresistible force, a calm yet organized fury, toward which one might long to revolt; yet the act of resistance against the injustice of a few chosen ones is little more than a contortion, almost a jolt endured in a dream.